

# Washington Department of Social and Health Services

## Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

# 2024-2027 State Plan

Effective July 1, 2024-June 30, 2027

Order of Selection Amendment Effective February 20, 2025

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### A. Input of State Rehabilitation Council

*(1) All VR agencies, except for those that have an independent consumer-controlled commission, must have a State Rehabilitation Council (Council or SRC) that meets the criteria in section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable, has (select A or B):*

(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council.

#### **Introduction**

This section is developed in partnership between the Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC) and the Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DSHS/DVR). Included are recommendations of the WSRC and the response of DSHS/DVR provided during FY 2023-2024.

#### **The Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC)**

The WSRC partners with DSHS/DVR to provide feedback and advocates to improve vocational rehabilitation services in Washington state.

#### **Order of Selection**

WSRC was an active partner in public review and comment on DSHS/DVR's proposal to amend the 2024-2027 State Plan to implement order of selection. WSRC's Executive Director led a team of DSHS/DVR and WSRC staff to prepare and distribute communications to customers and partners about the State Plan amendment and the opportunity to comment. Notices about the amendment and a public forum were distributed from August 9-16, 2024, and posted on DSHS/DVR's website. On September 16, 2024, DSHS/DVR and WSRC jointly facilitated a public forum to present the reasons for the amendment and its impact and address comments and questions from attendees. About 180 individuals attended the forum. Most questions were related to customer concerns about their case. They were advised to contact their counselor or the customer service email address.

One participant had questions about equitable access to services and engagement with diverse communities and advocacy organizations. A provider recommended that cases currently in eligibility status not be impacted by Order of Selection or that it only apply to new applicants. Commenters also requested that providers be advised of customer service priority category and asked whether the category closures would result in sufficient savings.



DSHS/DVR notified the WSRC in early June that it was assessing the need to implement Order of Selection, based on projected growth in caseloads and spending. DSHS/DVR completed the State Plan draft amendment the first week of August and sent the draft to WSRC for review on August 6. On August 8, the DSHS/DVR Director made a presentation to the WSRC about the plans for implementing Order of Selection. WSRC did not provide formal comments on the amendment but indicated support for the rationale. WSRC members participated in the public forum and had the opportunity to provide written feedback.

***(2) In accordance with Assurance 3(b), updated information on the current composition of the Council by representative type, including the term number of the representative, as applicable, the beginning dates of each representative’s term, and any vacancies.***

| <b>Council Representative</b>   | <b>Current Term Number/<br/>Vacant</b> | <b>Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.</b> |
|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)   | 1                                      | April 2024                            |
| Parent Training and Information Center  | 2                                      | October 2018                          |
| Client Assistance Program   | 2                                      | June 2021                             |
| Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (Ex Officio if Employed by the VR Agency)  | 2                                      | May 2020                              |
| Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider   | 2                                      | April 2019                            |
| Business, Industry, and Labor   | 1                                      | October 2021                          |
| Business, Industry, and Labor   | 1                                      | January 2022                          |
| Business, Industry, and Labor   | 2                                      | February 2020                         |
| Business, Industry, and Labor   | Vacant                                 |                                       |
| Disability Advocacy Groups  | 1                                      | January 2023                          |
| Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services   | 1                                      | January 2024                          |
| Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services   | 1                                      | April 2024                            |
| Section 121 Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Project Directors in the State (as applicable)   | 2                                      | January 2017                          |
| State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) | 1                                      | May 2022                              |
| State Workforce Development Board   | Vacant                                 |                                       |
| VR Agency Director (Ex Officio)   | 1                                      | January 2024                          |

***(3) If the SRC is not meeting the composition requirements in section 105(b) of the Rehabilitation Act and/or is not meeting quarterly as required in section 105(f) of the Rehabilitation Act, provide the steps that the VR agency is taking to ensure it meets those requirements.***

The WSRC Executive Committee, with the support of the Council Director, has an active recruitment plan to ensure we are actively working toward meeting our composition requirements through marketing and outreach efforts to fill vacant positions. This plan is reviewed regularly at our committee and full council meetings to raise awareness.

WSRC's website and marketing materials provide information about representative positions, time commitments, and the purpose of the council. We partner with our Designated State Agency to develop social media campaigns to reach a statewide audience. The Council conducts outreach with our statewide and local workforce board partners, community rehabilitation providers, VR program regional and unit meetings, community partner meetings and conferences. The Council Director is available for informational interviews with candidates that are interested in learning more about the role and commitment involved. We also extend the invitation to potential candidates to attend our quarterly council meetings and/or monthly subcommittee meetings.

The primary concern with recruitment is identifying qualified candidates who will proceed with steps to complete the application and interview process. Once the candidate is approved by the council, then we submit it to the Governor's office of Boards and Commissions for their vetting and appointment process. Typically, that takes 3-4 weeks. There have been limited circumstances where the Governor's office has not supported a candidate that the Council has advanced for consideration.

Currently, we are recruiting for the following representative positions.

- Business, Industry, or Labor: Recruitment efforts include outreach to the business and labor community through connections with our current members, meetings with the VR program Business Relations team, workforce development councils, workforce partners, businesses that have hired VR customers, and various other partner meetings.
- State Workforce Development Board – position became vacant on April 30, 2024 due to resignation. We are working closely with the leadership of the Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board to identify a new representative.

***(4) In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(21)(A)(ii)(III) of the Rehabilitation Act, include a summary of the Council's input (including how it was obtained) into the State Plan and any State Plan revisions, including recommendations from the Council's annual reports, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction and other Council reports.***

***(5) Provide the VR agency's response to the Council's input and recommendations, including an explanation for the rejection of any input and recommendations.***

### **WSRC Item 1 – May 2022**

The WSRC recommends implementing the Counselor Reassignment Best Practices Checklist as developed by the Policy & Planning subcommittee to support proactive communication with customers when they experience a counselor change. Customers experience significant impacts to the continuity of services when there is a counselor reassignment. The Customer Satisfaction & Program Evaluation subcommittee has received a significant level of feedback over the years in our Customer Satisfaction Surveys, Focus Groups, and Listening Sessions about this issue.

The primary objective of the checklist is to ensure customers are informed when their case is reassigned and that there is continuous case progress. This recommendation is also in support of Goal One in the 2020-2023 State Plan indicating that Customer Service & Outcomes are DSHS/DVR's Highest Priority along with the strategies to identify and address barriers, timely services, and continuous case progress throughout the VR process.

As advocates for DSHS/DVR customers, we believe implementation of a statewide consistent practice will assist in addressing the State Plan goal as well as increase customer satisfaction.

### **DSHS/DVR Response to WSRC Item 1**

DSHS/DVR has not adopted the Checklist presented by WSRC in full but agrees with the need for a process of consistent communication with customers when there are counselor changes and has modified its case transfer checklist to improve practice. DSHS/DVR acknowledges there has been significant staffing shortages that also impact counselor change. In addition to a plethora of other recruitment efforts, beginning the spring of 2023, DSHS/DVR began recruiting and filling VRC Float positions across local offices. These VRCs work with customers in locations with staff capacity concerns. They provide services remotely and in person, traveling within the region as necessary to meet customers' needs. This allows for timely service and continuous progress for customers, as offices are getting new staff onboarded and up to speed. DSHS/DVR also implemented automatic replies to outgoing staff emails, so customers know who to contact when their counselor has left the agency.

Part of the work of implementing a new case management system was to ensure a standard operating procedure for contacting customers when their case is being transferred. While not yet in place, the new database has the capability to automatically produce letters for customers, which can be processed and mailed by support personnel to ensure timely communication. Further, now that the case management system is in place, work is being done to review the operating procedures, processes, and checklists with the goal of aligning a non-paper procedure with field practice and the new management system that can be trained to all staff.

### **WSRC Item 2 – April 2023**

The WSRC recommends implementation of Rapid Engagement as a best practice to maximize the likelihood that customers will be active participants throughout the VR process. As part of Council responsibilities, we administer a quarterly customer satisfaction survey to customers in the following case status. One of the questions that we ask in the survey is “DVR moves quickly enough for me”, and consistently it is the lowest rated score on the survey. In FFY22 the statewide results for this question range from 58-62%. In support of this recommendation, we encourage technology modernization including implementation of digital and/or electronic signatures as well as advancing records retention technology such as email to text and cell phone to text.

### **DSHS/DVR Response to WSRC Item 2**

DSHS/DVR agrees with the recommendation to implement Rapid Engagement best practices to improve continuity, efficiency, and meaningful customer engagement in services. In response to the WSRC led Rapid Engagement Listening Sessions, DSHS/DVR authorized and implemented an electronic signature and forms management system called DocuSign in August of 2023. This implementation was an explicit recommendation following these listening sessions. DocuSign allows for filling out forms digitally and digital signature on various DVR forms: Applications, consent forms, Eligibilities, Plans for Employment, and other DSHS/DVR forms to be completed in real time and facilitates expedited services. This has significantly reduced the administrative burden of gathering physical signatures from staff, customers, partners, and families. We continue to expand the electronic forms management system to add various forms and are planning the transition and Pre-ETS implementation. At the time of writing 1,491 forms had been signed using the new system. In addition to electronic signature, DSHS/DVR field leadership have also encouraged meaningful engagement and using counselor judgement when applicable for processes like determining eligibility, completing a timely IPE, and determining the nature and scope of available services, and the provision of these services.

DSHS/DVR trains staff on critical and flexible strategies without compromising responsibilities of VR counselors at key points in the DSHS/DVR process. Staff conducted in-person statewide training on Washington Administrative Code for all field staff with the goal of providing staff autonomy, authority, and consistent practices to contribute to customer retention, timely provision of needed and valued services, as well as long-term success and customer satisfaction. These successes are expected to improve agency performance, maximize expenditure of available funds, and increase provision of pre-employment transition services.

Critical organizational change management and culture shifting has been underway at DSHS/DVR in order to better support the above listed efforts.

### **Summary of Customer Satisfaction**

Between October 1, 2022, and September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023, customer satisfaction input was gathered through Customer Satisfaction Survey and Customer Listening Sessions.

#### Customer Satisfaction Survey

In 2023, we are in our third year partnering with Washington State University's Social and Economic Sciences Research Center to administer the DSHS/DVR Customer Satisfaction Survey. In effort to ensure we are supporting best practices in language accessibility, we are offering the survey in the following languages: Amharic, Arabic, Cambodian, Chinese, English, Farsi, Korean, Laotian, Punjabi, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Tigrigna, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese.

Our survey asks customers the following seven questions, allowing them the opportunity to rate their responses on a five-point Likert scale:

1. My counselor does a good job keeping in touch with me.
2. My counselor understands what is important to me.
3. My counselor understands how my disability affects me.
4. My counselor cares about my input.
5. DVR moves quickly enough for me.
6. Overall, I am satisfied with DVR.
  - a. Open end comment for dissatisfied customers.
7. Comment box with option to share additional comments with DVR.

DSHS/DVR customers receive an invitation by mail and email to participate in our survey via a web portal or a phone-in option. Customers are surveyed in three of the four phases of the Vocational Rehabilitation process: plan, closed-employed and closed-other.

The council shares survey results and comment highlights with DSHS/DVR leadership and partners at each of our quarterly meetings. We look forward to seeing how DSHS/DVR's adoption of Results, an Enterprise Performance Management System, will elevate staff access and awareness of survey data to support informed decision and discussion to make improvements in service delivery.

The survey is sent to a randomized sample of customers on a quarterly basis. We are reporting results from the question "Overall, I am satisfied with DVR" for FFY22 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter through FFY23 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter with a total of 1,647 respondents.

- FFY22 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter – April to June 2022 (Response Rate 35%)
  - Region 1 – 74% (Margin of Error +/- 9%)
  - Region 2 – 66% (Margin of Error +/- 7%)
  - Region 3 – 58% (Margin of Error +/- 9%)
  - Statewide – 65% (Margin of Error +/- 5%)
- FFY22 4<sup>th</sup> quarter – July to September 2022 (Response Rate 35%)
  - Region 1 – 79% (Margin of Error +/- 8%)
  - Region 2 – 70% (Margin of Error +/- 7%)
  - Region 3 – 72% (Margin of Error +/- 7%)
  - Statewide – 73% (Margin of Error +/- 4%)
- FFY23 1<sup>st</sup> quarter – October to December 2022 (Response Rate 44%)
  - Region 1 – 75% (Margin of Error +/- 7%)
  - Region 2 – 70% (Margin of Error +/- 6%)
  - Region 3 – 64% (Margin of Error +/- 7%)
  - Statewide – 69% (Margin of Error +/- 4%)
- FFY23 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter – January to March 2023 (Response Rate 39%)
  - Region 1 – 68% (Margin of Error +/- 9%)
  - Region 2 – 73% (Margin of Error +/- 6%)
  - Region 3 – 61% (Margin of Error +/- 8%)
  - Statewide – 68% (Margin of Error +/- 4%)

Customer satisfaction survey results from the question “DVR moves quickly enough for me” for FFY22 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter through FFY23 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter with a total of 1,647 respondents.

- FFY22 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter – April to June 2022 (Response Rate 35%)
  - Region 1 – 62% (Margin of Error +/- 10%)
  - Region 2 – 60% (Margin of Error +/- 8%)
  - Region 3 – 43% (Margin of Error +/- 9%)
  - Statewide – 55% (Margin of Error +/- 5%)
- FFY22 4<sup>th</sup> quarter – July to September 2022 (Response Rate 35%)
  - Region 1 – 65% (Margin of Error +/- 10%)
  - Region 2 – 60% (Margin of Error +/- 8%)
  - Region 3 – 62% (Margin of Error +/- 8%)
  - Statewide – 62% (Margin of Error +/- 5%)
- FFY23 1<sup>st</sup> quarter – October to December 2022 (Response Rate 44%)
  - Region 1 – 66% (Margin of Error +/- 10%)
  - Region 2 – 59% (Margin of Error +/- 6%)
  - Region 3 – 55% (Margin of Error +/- 8%)
  - Statewide – 60% (Margin of Error +/- 4%)
- FFY23 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter – January to March 2023 (Response Rate 39%)
  - Region 1 – 55% (Margin of Error +/- 10%)
  - Region 2 – 65% (Margin of Error +/- 6%)
  - Region 3 – 51% (Margin of Error +/- 8%)
  - Statewide – 58% (Margin of Error +/- 4%)

## Listening Sessions

### Assistive Technology

In October 2022, council members held listening sessions with DSHS/DVR Assistive Technology Assessment Practitioners and customers who have received their services. DSHS/DVR currently employs four ATAPs serving customers statewide with their assistive technology needs. Some examples of assistive technology include computer keyboards, laptops, accessibility software, vehicle modifications, etc. Some general themes we heard from customers include that their ATAP providers do an excellent job building rapport with their customers. Several customers expressed that services are provided in a caring and professional way. Customers feel “seen” and understood as a whole person. Their ATAPs understand the many ways their disability affects different aspects of their lives. ATAP providers are very knowledgeable and resourceful. Nearly every customer spoke about the high competencies of their provider, explaining that they felt they were in good hands because the ATAP is knowledgeable about what options of assistive technology would be best for their unique need.

Council members concluded that building awareness of ATAP services with DSHS/DVR staff can include further training for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to increase awareness and scope of ATAP services to support successful rehabilitation outcomes. Additionally, there is a great need for additional administrative support. Seven of the 10 participants spoke to how they can tell that their ATAP provider is very knowledgeable and capable, and how response times are often slow and other steps to receive their assistive technology devices are delayed because the ATAP must manage every aspect of process. Customers expressed their sincere understanding and awareness that staff manage high caseloads, but they pointed out the need for additional support for their ATAP provider.

### Rapid Engagement

As the national conversation unfolds about the importance of meaningful engagement of customers throughout the vocational rehabilitation process, the council held listening sessions in March 2023 with executive leadership and field staff on the topic of rapid engagement.

What is rapid engagement? As defined by the VRTAC-QM, it is “a strategy whereby individuals with disabilities are moved through the rehabilitation process (referral to application, application to eligibility determination, eligibility to IPE development) as quickly and efficiently as possible in order to maximize the likelihood that they will be active and full participants in their rehabilitation plans and achieve successful outcomes.”

Why is rapid engagement important? As part of council responsibilities, we administer a quarterly customer satisfaction survey to customers in the following case status. One of the questions that we ask in the survey is whether “DVR moves quickly enough for me”, and consistently it is the lowest-rated score on the survey. Vocational Rehabilitation programs are talking more about rapid engagement to seek new ways to meet customers’ needs and increase engagement and retention of customers in the VR program.

To gather feedback from staff, the Council held a combination of individual meetings with leadership as well as four listening sessions. A total of 38 DSHS/DVR staff participated with representation from each region, and most job classes, including the director, regional administrators, supervisors, counselors, and rehabilitation technicians. DSHS/DVR staff shared best practices they were already utilizing and new ideas to support this effort. The council carefully analyzed all feedback received and categorized it into three main groups: technology, partnerships, and service delivery.

- **Technology:** Staff addressed the need for additional and upgraded technology to allow for efficient service provision. Modern technology could greatly reduce the significant time staff spend tracking down and maintaining documentation, resulting in more time available to provide services to customers.
- **Partnerships:** For rapid engagement to be effective, partnerships with Community Rehabilitation Providers, Developmental Disabilities Administration, Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery services, workforce system, Tribal VR, the public school system, as well as other agencies, need to be utilized throughout the process—from intake to case closure. Working relationships between DSHS/DVR and CRPs need to be strengthened and restored. Additionally, consistent feedback from field staff supported the importance of strengthening Memorandums of Understanding with DSHS/DVR’s partners.
- **Service Delivery:** We heard how simple strategies can increase customer engagement and make work easier for staff throughout each aspect of the process, from application, intake and eligibility, to plan development and case progress.

## B. Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

(Source: 2022 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), DSHS/DVR)

**Section 101(a)(15), (17), and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to provide an assessment of:**

### *(1) The VR services needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State*

#### Introduction

Washington DSHS/DVR contracted with the Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation at the University of Washington in 2022 to conduct a comprehensive statewide needs assessment to identify the current and changing vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities in the state of Washington. The assessment draws upon results from surveys and interviews of a broad spectrum of customers, staff, and stakeholders conducted between August and October 2022 and the following secondary data sources:

- United States Census Bureau 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) which is sent each year to a random sample of over 3.5 million households.
- The United States Social Security Administration (SSA) data published December 2020.
- Washington DVR case service data for all cases in plan July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022.

The data that appear in this report are relevant to the following activities:

- Projecting needs for services and redeployment of services;
- Identifying common and unique needs of specific sub-populations;
- Identifying perceived gaps in vocational rehabilitation services; and
- Providing data and a rationale for the development of the State Plan and amendments to the Plan.



The four major activities of this assessment included:

- i. A review of existing data sources for the purpose of identifying and describing the target population and subpopulations statewide.
- ii. Electronic surveys or individual interviews with DSHS/DVR customers in plan status served within the time frame July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021. A total of 688 surveys were completed, including 90 transition aged customers.
- iii. Electronic surveys of staff with 98 surveys completed.
- iv. Key informant interviews with individuals identified as knowledgeable about the needs of individuals with disabilities in Washington. A total of 28 interviews were completed with more than 45 individuals participating.

A comparison of the common themes that emerged from the various data sources (key informant interviews, customer surveys, and staff) was conducted to validate the information gathered. The results of the surveys and interviews with customers, staff, and key informants were organized into seven categories:

- Barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities
- Services and service provision in addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities in Washington
- Unserved and underserved populations
- Transition services to transition aged youth
- Partnerships with community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) and other agencies/organizations that serve individuals with disabilities
- Provision of services through WorkSource to people with disabilities
- Business partnerships

### **Washingtonians Living with Disabilities**

According to 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) estimates, 12.7% of the population reported a disability in Washington, which is the same percentage reported in the U.S. (12.7%). The percentage of males with a disability in Washington (12.8%) is slightly higher than the corresponding national percentage (12.5%) while the percentage of females with a disability (12.7%) is the same as the corresponding national percentage (12.7%).

When comparing the prevalence of disability for Washington and the U.S. by age, the prevalence of disability by age in Washington is similar to the percentages in the U.S. in all age ranges except the age range 18-34. The percentage of individuals with a disability living in Washington, ages 18-34 (1.6%), is slightly higher than the U.S. population (0.65%).

When comparing the prevalence by race/ethnicity and disability in Washington and the U.S. based on annual estimates of the resident population, April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2021, the prevalence of disability in Washington is higher than the U.S. in three categories: White, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Asian. The prevalence of disability for White Washingtonians (14.8%) is higher than in the U.S. (14.0%). The prevalence of disability for Washingtonians who identify as American Indian/Alaska Native (17.4%) is higher than in the U.S. (15.1%). The prevalence of disability for Washingtonians who identify as Asian (8.1%) is slightly higher than in the U.S. (7.8%). The percentage of Washingtonians who identify as Hispanic with a disability is (8.1%) is lower than the percentage of Hispanic individuals with a disability in the U.S. (9.9%).

When comparing the employment rates by race, ethnicity, and gender for individuals ages 18-64 who report a disability in Washington, data for American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander is not available from the 2020 American Community Survey

The employment rates for people with disabilities in Washington is higher in most instances than the employment rates in the U.S., likely due to the stronger state economy. The employment gap is the difference in the percentage of individuals with and without disabilities who are employed. The employment gap is slightly higher for non-Hispanic Asian individuals with disabilities living in Washington (32%) than the employment gap for non-Hispanic Asian individuals with disabilities in the U.S. (30%) and Hispanic individuals with disabilities living in Washington (36.5%) compared to the U.S. (32.8%). The employment gap is less for non-Hispanic black individuals with disabilities (33.4%) than in the U.S. (40.3%).

In looking at employment rates for selected disability groups, the percentages are slightly higher than the U.S. rates. For individuals with a hearing disability ages 18 to 64 the employment rate is 55.9% in Washington compared to the U.S. (52%). For individuals with a cognitive disability, the employment rate in Washington is 29.6% compared to 29.1% in the U.S. and for individuals with a vision disability the employment rate in Washington is 46.9% compared to 45.5% in the U.S.

The American Community Survey collects and reports information on the most prevalent industries and occupations for individuals with and without disabilities. ACS asks respondents about their primary job and, for individuals who have not worked in the last five years, their most recent job. Industries are categorized based on the North American Industry Classification system (NAICS) which is a publication of the federal Office of Management and Budget.

The percentage of people with disabilities working in the Education Service Industry in Washington is slightly higher (8.8%) than individuals without disabilities (8.3%) and higher than people with disabilities in the U.S. (7.9%). In the Manufacturing Industry, the percentage of people with disabilities in Washington and in the U.S. is the same (9.9%) and higher than the percentage of people without disabilities (8.8%). The Retail Trade Industry and Office and Administrative Support Occupations follow the same trend. Two industries where the percentage of people with disabilities employed in Washington is less than those without disabilities and the U.S. rates are the Health Care & Social Assistance Industry and Sales and Related Occupations. The percentages for the Health Care and Social Assistance Industry for individuals with disabilities working in Washington (12.3%) is almost 2% less than individuals with disabilities in the U.S. (14.9%).

The gap in median earnings for workers with disabilities in Washington is approximately \$8,428 when compared to those without disabilities. This gap in earnings in Washington is greater than found in the U.S. which is \$7,719. This data does not include workers who did not work in the last 12 months or who worked less than full-time. As income may be skewed, earnings are expressed as median earnings.

The American Community Survey collects information on poverty rates, based on income levels defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. The poverty rate for individuals with disabilities in Washington State (25.5%) is less than the U.S. rates (27.8%); however, the gap between those with and without disabilities is larger in Washington (16.3%) compared to the U.S. (15.9%).

DSHS/DVR examined the demographic characteristics of Washington case service data for those in plan status July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021, and compared it to population estimates and demographic characteristics of individuals with disabilities in Washington. It is important to note that individuals with

disabilities may not wish to utilize the services of WA DSHS/DVR, may have disabilities that are not sufficiently severe to warrant DSHS/DVR services, or may voluntarily be out of the workforce. Furthermore, significant differences between the characteristics of the DSHS/DVR population of customers and the characteristics of the population of people with disabilities in the state indicate that further study beyond this report may be needed.

Estimates made by the U.S. Census in 2020 found 942,827 individuals reported a disability in the state of Washington. In the period July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021, DSHS/DVR served 15,765 individuals (excluding recipients of Pre-Employment Transition Services). Data indicates that the percentage of individuals identifying as men (57%) was higher than the percentage of women served during the same period (43%). The percentage of individuals with disabilities in Washington state was equally split by male/female gender (49.5%).

DSHS/DVR compared the distribution by county of cases and cases in plan July 1, 2020, through June 30th, 2021, with ACS estimates for people in those counties who reported a disability in 2020. This information might be useful in planning for future resource distribution. The data show that the highest percentage of cases were in King County (25%), followed by Pierce (11%) and Snohomish (9.6%). According to ACS data, Thurston and Spokane counties have the highest percentage of people ages 18-64 reporting a disability relative to the population (16.0%) whereas King County has the lowest percentage of people reporting a disability (10%). The percentage of the population with a disability, ages 18-64 follows a similar pattern with Spokane and Thurston Counties with the highest rates (13.5% and 12.9%) and King County with the lowest percentage of people with disabilities ages 18-64 (7.4%).

For the CSNA, the Center for Continuing Education also obtained data using three other methods, including a customer survey, DSHS/DVR staff survey, and stakeholder interviews.

### **Barriers to Employment for Individuals with Disabilities**

In analyzing the collected information, a couple of themes emerge regarding barriers to employment – organizational and societal. Examples of organizational issues include high staff turnover, inconsistency in the delivery of services across the state, and the complexity of DSHS/DVR’s process (including Order of Selection). Societal barriers focus on infrastructure issues such as the lack of transportation in both rural and urban areas of the State. Other societal issues include the continuing attitudinal barriers individuals with disabilities experience, especially among employers.

Customers were asked to identify how their disability affects their ability to get a job, keep a job, or advance in their career development. The top three barriers identified include work tolerance, communication, and interpersonal skills. The three primary disabilities reported by customer respondents included Autism Spectrum Disorder, Mental Health/Psychiatric disability, and Intellectual disability. Non-disability related barriers reported by customers focused on education/training, job skills, available jobs, job-seeking skills, and employer attitudes. Other notable challenges reported by customers that make it difficult to get or keep a job or advance in a career include change in health condition and health management, COVID, the job market, and a need for flexible hours or lack of work history. Most customers ( $n=499$ ; 80.6%) report DSHS/DVR services are provided in a convenient location and that they are easily able to get around the DSHS/DVR office building ( $n=445$ ; 72.8%); however, a sizable proportion indicate they have never been to a DSHS/DVR office given the change to remote services due to COVID. Almost 76% ( $n=466$ ) of customers indicate they can use technology or equipment and just over 92% ( $n=567$ ) report they are able to communicate using their own language to participate in DSHS/DVR services.

The staff respondents identified three themes as barriers to achieving successful employment outcomes. These included social barriers, such as access to mental health care, society and employer attitudes, social support resources, physical/environmental barriers, family barriers, and communication. Personal barriers included severity of the disability, customer behavior, homelessness/housing, income, criminal background, and interpersonal skills. Transportation was identified as a third major barrier by staff. DSHS/DVR staff report the three main reasons customers might find it difficult to access DSHS/DVR services are not knowing about or having a limited understanding of DSHS/DVR services, transportation, and access to technology.

Finally, key informant participants identified some similar themes with the most frequently mentioned organizational barriers being the complexity of DSHS/DVR's processes, inconsistency among staff and service delivery approaches, staff turnover, and Order of Selection. Societal barriers identified by key informants included employer attitudes and general stigma about people who have disabilities as well as the lack of reliable transportation.

## **Customer Survey**

A total of 4781 DSHS/DVR customers were sent the 2022 CSNA Customer Survey electronically or randomly selected to be contacted by phone from the no-email list to attain their perspectives regarding customer barriers to achieving their employment goals, DSHS/DVR service needs, most helpful services, remote services, WorkSource, and customer perspectives about how DSHS/DVR services can be improved. Six-hundred eighty-eight (N=688) customers responded to the survey for a response rate of 14.4% (688/4781). DSHS/DVR customers were asked questions to inquire about their experiences and needs related to barriers to employment.

### ***Disability Barriers***

Customers were asked to identify how their disability affects their ability to get a job, keep a job, or advance in their career. Disability-related functional limitations related to mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, and work skills are relatively well dispersed. Work tolerance (or being able to work for a sustained period, lift, stand, sit, tolerate stress), with the highest number of responses ( $n=365$ ), communication (or being able to use formal language, spoken or sign, understand others, or be understood) ( $n=290$ ), and interpersonal skills (or ability to interact and develop relationships with others) ( $n=286$ ) are the top three identified disability-related barriers.

### ***Non-Disability Barriers***

The top non-disability barriers reported by customers are education or training/credentials ( $n=287$ ), followed by job skills ( $n=259$ ), available jobs ( $n=251$ ), job-seeking skills ( $n=222$ ), and employer attitudes ( $n=207$ ).

### ***Services***

In terms of timeliness of DSHS/DVR staff response and services, eighty-two percent ( $n=562$ ) agree or strongly agree that DSHS/DVR staff answered their questions, responded to their requests, and were told of changes. About 86% ( $n=541$ ) agree or strongly agree that DSHS/DVR staff provide accommodations needed to participate in DSHS/DVR services, and just over 91% ( $n=617$ ) agree or strongly agree that DSHS/DVR staff are sensitive to their cultural background and identity. This last item received the highest rating in this area of DSHS/DVR staff response and services.

DSHS/DVR customers were asked to mark DSHS/DVR services they have found most helpful. Customers identified VR Counseling and Guidance, Assessment, and Job Search Assistance as the most helpful employment related DSHS/DVR services. Similarly, the top three VR or related services identified by DSHS/DVR staff that are most needed by DSHS/DVR customers to achieve their employment goals include Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling and Guidance, Job Placement services, and Training (college or university training and Occupational/Vocational training). DSHS/DVR customers rate the quality of employment related DSHS/DVR services as very good (39%), followed by good (24%), acceptable (16%), poor (11%), and very poor (10%).

Customers were also surveyed about the quality of vocational rehabilitation (VR) counseling received. Almost 88% agree or strongly agree ( $n=600$ ) that their DSHS/DVR counselor shared information in a way they could understand. This item received the highest rating percentage in quality of VR counseling. Whereas just over two thirds ( $n=457$ ; 67.4%) agree or strongly agree that their DSHS/DVR counselor helped them understand their disability and how it may affect future work. This last question received the lowest rating percentage in quality of VR counseling.

The lack of transportation both in rural and urban areas seems to influence the delivery of services as well as impede customers in the pursuit of their employment goals. Overall, most respondents indicated that DSHS/DVR is an organization with dedicated staff who do a good job of serving individuals with disabilities in Washington with the current available resources. Furthermore, 479 customers provided additional comments to improve services and several key informants expressed appreciation for recent changes in leadership.

## **Staff Survey**

Three hundred thirty-seven WA state DSHS/DVR staff were sent the 2022 CSNA WA Staff Survey electronically to attain their perspectives regarding customer barriers to employment, DSHS/DVR customer service needs, needs for underserved or unserved customers, Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), Transition Services, Partner Programs, Remote Services, and Staff Support. Ninety-Eight ( $N=98$ ) staff responded to the survey for a response rate of 29.1% ( $98/337$ ). A follow-up survey was sent out in August 2023 for further assessment of any changes that may have taken place. Findings were consistent across both surveys. Highlights of overall findings based on results and thematic analysis of staff comments who responded to the survey questions are listed below.

### **Barriers**

The top three themes of barriers identified by DSHS/DVR staff ( $n=98$ ) that prevent DSHS/DVR customers from achieving successful employment outcomes are social barriers, personal barriers, and transportation. Social barriers and personal barriers had the most staff comments, and then transportation.

### **Service Needs**

The top three VR or related services identified by DSHS/DVR staff ( $n=96$ ) that are most needed by DSHS/DVR customers to achieve their employment goals include Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling & Guidance, Job Placement, and Training (Vocational Technical/Higher Education). Example comments from staff representative of each main theme are described below.

### **Access to Services**

Ninety-eight DSHS/DVR staff respondents report the three main reasons customers might find it difficult to access DSHS/DVR services are not knowing about or having a limited understanding of

DSHS/DVR services, with the most comments, followed by transportation, and access to technology.

### **Key Informant/Stakeholder/Partner Interviews**

In collaboration with the Washington SRC, CCER identified more than 30 partner agencies, service providers and individuals who could potentially provide input as key informants to Washington DSHS/DVR. During September and October of 2022, CCER conducted 28 interviews with identified key informants to collect critical community information about barriers to employment and the rehabilitation service needs of individuals in Washington who have disabilities. All interviews were conducted live via video conferencing and approximately 46 individuals representing a variety of entities across the state of Washington participated. An accommodation in the form of an American Sign Language interpreter was provided by one of the interviewees and all interviews were accessible. Interviewees were informed that their input would be documented and aggregated in a final report alongside other collected data to preserve confidentiality.

#### ***Barriers to Successful Outcomes***

Interviewees were asked to identify the most prevalent barriers encountered by people with disabilities while trying to achieve a successful outcome. The following themes were identified and addressed by multiple respondents: **the complexity of the DSHS/DVR process, Inconsistency in quality of staff, staff philosophies, and service delivery, employer Attitudes and Disability Stigma, transportation, staff turnover, order of selection.**

#### ***Rehabilitation Service Needs***

Key Informants were asked to identify the most important services needed by people with disabilities to achieve successful employment. Services identified as the top three most important services by respondents: rapid engagement/timely responses from counselors, job exploration, career planning, job training, job sampling, work-based learning, job coaching, job development/placement, behavioral health services, independent living services, benefits planning.

#### ***DSHS/DVR Areas of Strength***

Throughout the key informant interviews, almost all the respondents had positive things to say about Washington DVR. In at least 9 of the 28 interviews, DVR's partners described their relationship with DSHS/DVR as productive and strong, while still pointing to the need for improving collaboration and partnerships. This seems to indicate that most of the key informants recognize DSHS/DVR's efforts and intentions but still see room for functional improvement. Additionally, many respondents took the opportunity to highlight the quality and direction of the current DSHS/DVR director. Many of the respondents also mentioned staff "pockets of excellence" and made statements such as "We've seen lots of improvement in DSHS/DVR's engagement with community partners and their ability to craft services to meet the audience they're working with" and "there are excellent staff who engage well with clients and provide quick turn-around."

Although interviewees represented a broad range of partners and service providers, interviews did not include representatives in the following specialty areas: tribal vocational rehabilitation programs, autism-specific service providers, entities serving only individuals with brain injury, or Washington employers and businesses. Outreach to these groups to solicit their input was undertaken in other ways during the State Plan planning process.

*(A) Individuals with the most significant disabilities and their need for Supported Employment.*

DSHS/DVR reviewed MSD cases during the two-year period July 1, 2021-June 30, 2023, and consulted with experts to assess service rates for individuals with most significant disabilities (MSD) and the need for and availability of supported employment services.

While still in an Order of Selection, originally implemented on November 1, 2017, DSHS/DVR has completely opened all categories for service on July 1, 2023. Over 64% of all applications during the reporting period were customers who had MSD determinations. Over 57% of MSD customers had supported employment needs identified on their IPE; 92% of these customers listed having a cognitive disability and 84% of these customers also listed having a psychosocial disability.

DSHS/DVR service data suggest that DSHS/DVR has greater challenges assisting individuals with behavioral health, physical/mobility, and vision impairments to move from eligibility determination to plan development than individuals with cognitive disabilities. Since the need for supported employment is assessed in the plan development process, service needs are likely to be greater than indicated by the data for customers in plan. However, the employment rate for MSD customers is comparable to the rate for all customers.

### **Barriers to Successful Outcomes**

The barriers to participation and successful outcomes experienced by customers with supported employment needs are similar to those faced by all customers. However, those with supported employment needs are especially affected by limited availability of and access to behavioral health care and insufficient resources for extended services after case closure. Access to social support resources, such as housing, and employer attitudes about hiring people with disabilities also present significant barriers to success.

Vocational Rehabilitation services for people with supported employment needs often require coordination with other service systems, particularly developmental disabilities and behavioral health systems. In the CSNA staff survey, 70% of staff rated service coordination with developmental disabilities agencies as “Good” or “Excellent”, whereas only 33% of staff rate the quality of service coordination on cases shared with mental health/behavioral health agencies similarly. Staff indicate that communication and coordination with both partners and understanding of each other’s services and roles need improvement. However, availability of behavioral health services and providers is insufficient, and the extent of coordination and direct partnerships is significantly less with behavioral health providers.

### **Supported Employment Services and Systems**

Funding for supported employment services is segmented among DSHS/DVR, DSHS/Developmental Disabilities Administration (DSHS/DDA), the Health Care Authority Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (HCA/DBHR), and DSHS Aging and Long-Term Services Administration (DSHS/ALTSA). DBHR and ALTSA have program oversight responsibility for Foundational Community Supports (FCS), which provides resources for supported employment. Coordination among these lead agencies is complicated and insufficient. Ideally, DDA and FCS services are complementary to and braided with DSHS/DVR’s services, to enable individuals to access resources from both systems when needed and as appropriate to their needs.

DSHS/DVR services are time-limited, whereas both DDA and FCS can be ongoing. DSHS/DVR typically provides assessment, job placement, intensive training services, and support services needed by the

individual to obtain a job and achieve stable job performance. DDA or FCS long-term supports begin when the customer reaches stabilization on the job. DDA and FCS can provide job placement services and short-term supports for customers ineligible for DSHS/DVR services; however, the range of services is more limited than those available from DSHS/DVR.

Supported employment resources have expanded statewide with the startup of FCS in 2018 but availability of long-term supports is insufficient to meet the need and is often a determining factor in access to VR services. DSHS/DVR customers with behavioral health needs may not qualify for FCS or be connected to behavioral health services. Additionally, permanent adoption of FCS is not yet assured. DSHS/DVR could also expand long-term supports by encouraging supported employment providers to focus on developing natural supports within customers' workplaces.

Definitions and understanding of eligibility for services, readiness to participate, and long-term support differ among the three programs. To effectively serve customers, these differences need to be bridged and staff and providers need to be knowledgeable about the different systems and services. Additionally, customers and their families or advocates need better access to benefits planning and understanding of the impact of work on other benefits, to make an informed choice about pursuing employment.

*(B) Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program.*

The CSNA assessed racial and ethnic characteristics of individuals with disabilities, ages 18-64 in the state of Washington, and DSHS/DVR clients served during the period July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021. Information on unserved and underserved populations was also obtained through a staff survey and stakeholder interviews.

People who identify as American Indian/Alaska Native have the highest rate of disability in Washington State. Nearly one in five American Indian/Alaska Native individuals ages 18-64 (18.3%) report having a disability, indicating the need for services is especially high in this community.

**Rate of Disability for Individuals Age 18-64 in Washington State by Race/Ethnicity**

| <b>Race/Ethnicity</b>                      | <b>Number</b> | <b>Rate of Disability</b> |
|--|---------------|---------------------------|
| American Indian or Alaska Native           | 10,980        | 18.3%                     |
| Asian                                      | 25,374        | 5.0%                      |
| Black or African American                  | 21,050        | 11.2%                     |
| Hispanic or Latino (of any race)           | 59,456        | 9.6%                      |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander | 3,905         | 11.1%                     |
| White                                      | 365,221       | 11.7%                     |
| Some other race                            | 24,434        | 8.8%                      |

Individuals who identified as White comprised the highest proportion of the DSHS/DVR caseload (76.5%), followed by Some Other Race (12.4%), Hispanic or Latino (12.1%), and Black or African American (10.4%). American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander customers were about 5% or less of DVR's service population. The diversity of DSHS/DVR's service population was similar to that of people ages 18-64 with disabilities. However, the percent of DVR customers by race/ethnicity is not strictly comparable to the percent of each group in the statewide population of people with disabilities, since individuals who identify with more than one race are counted in each category for DVR cases but are excluded from ACS data. Key informant surveys suggest that racial and ethnic minorities are underserved at least in some areas of the State.



**Race/Ethnicity of DVR Customers and All Individuals with Disabilities Ages 18-64 in Washington State**

| <b>Race/Ethnicity</b>                      | <b>Number of DVR Cases</b> | <b>Percent of DVR Cases</b> | <b>Number of Individuals with Disabilities Ages 18-64</b> | <b>Percent of All Individuals with Disabilities Ages 18-64</b> |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|
| American Indian or Alaska Native           | 814                        | 5.2%                        | 10,980  | 2.4%   |
| Asian                                      | 734                        | 4.7%                        | 25,374  | 5.6%   |
| Black or African American                  | 1,647                      | 10.4%                       | 21,050  | 4.7%   |
| Hispanic or Latino (of any race)           | 1,911                      | 12.1%                       | 59,456  | 11.6%  |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander | 550                        | 3.5%                        | 3,905   | 0.9%   |
| White                                      | 12,066                     | 76.5%                       | 365,221   | 81.0%  |
| Some Other Race                            | 1,957                      | 12.4%                       | 24,434  | 5.4%   |

*\*Note: Individuals who identify with more than one race/ethnicity are counted in each category for DVR case data but are excluded from American Community Survey data.*

American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American customers experienced lower than average success in obtaining employment during this program year: 42.8% and 46.7%, respectively, compared to 50.0% for all DVR customers.

**Closure Outcomes of DVR Customers by Race/Ethnicity**

| <b>Race/Ethnicity</b>                      | <b>Percent Closed Employed</b> | <b>Number Closed Employed</b> | <b>Percent Closed Other</b> | <b>Number Closed Other</b> |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| American Indian or Alaska Native           | 42.8%                          | 62                            | 57.2%                       | 83                         |
| Asian                                      | 59.4%                          | 120                           | 40.6%                       | 82                         |
| Black or African American                  | 46.7%                          | 149                           | 53.3%                       | 170                        |
| Hispanic or Latino (of any race)           | 49.0%                          | 64                            | 41.3%                       | 45                         |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander | 58.7%                          | 1,247                         | 50.1%                       | 1,253                      |
| White                                      | 49.9%                          | 196                           | 51.0%                       | 204                        |
| Total                                      | 50.0%                          | 1,838                         | 50.0%                       | 1,837                      |

Employment rates for people with disabilities in Washington are highest for individuals who identify as Asian (43.7%), followed by Black/African American (40.2%), Hispanic/Latino (39.5%), and White (38.7%). Data for American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander are not available from the American Community Survey. Employment rates for people with disabilities in Washington are higher in most instances than the employment rates in the U.S.

The employment gap is the difference in the percentage of individuals with and without disabilities who are employed. Within Washington, the gap is highest for individuals who identify as White (38.5%) and Hispanic or Latino (36.5%).

When compared to national data, the employment gap is slightly higher for Asian individuals with disabilities in Washington (32%) than in the U.S. (30%) and for Hispanic/Latino individuals with disabilities in Washington (36.5%) compared to the U.S. (32.8%). The employment gap is less for Black/African American individuals with disabilities (33.4%) than in the U.S. (40.3%).

**Employment Rate and Employment Gap by Race/Ethnicity for Individuals with Disabilities Ages 18-64**

| Race/Ethnicity            | Employment Rate With a Disability WA | Employment Rate With no Disability WA | Employment Gap WA | Employment Gap US |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Asian                     | 43.7%                                | 75.7%                                 | 32.0%             | 30.0%             |
| Black or African American | 40.2%                                | 73.6%                                 | 33.4%             | 40.3%             |
| Hispanic or Latino        | 39.5%                                | 76.4%                                 | 36.5%             | 32.8%             |
| White                     | 38.7%                                | 77.2%                                 | 38.5%             | 39.1%             |
| Other                     | 36.5%                                | 70.9%                                 | 34.4%             | 36.8%             |

Key informant interviews indicate other groups that are not well served by DSHS/DVR include individuals with mental health or auditory disabilities, people who identify as LGBTQ, and people who are living in rural communities, non-English speakers, migrants/refugees, justice system-involved, or homeless.

*(C) Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the workforce development system.*

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DSHS/DVR) is one of six core programs in Washington’s workforce development system. Each program depends on the strengths of other partners to maximize the resources available to serve businesses and job seekers. Ten additional partners bring supplemental resources to the service delivery system.

Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board is the State’s federally designated Workforce Investment Board, which collaborates with business, labor organizations, state agencies, 12 Workforce Development Councils (WDC) and other program partners to develop the Combined State Plan.

WDC’s oversee the local one-stop service delivery system and coordinate with a broad range of local partners, including business, labor organizations, education, social services, and government. One-stop partners, also known as WorkSource, administer a set of programs to provide integrated streamlined services to customers.

There are three types of WorkSource centers: comprehensive center, affiliate, and connection sites. Twenty-two Comprehensive centers are physical locations where job seeker and employer customers access programs, services, and activities of the core WorkSource partners. Twenty-four Affiliate sites provide access to one or more partner programs and the availability of staff is determined at the local level. Seventy-two Connection sites offer virtual resources and services of the WorkSource system.

WorkSource centers assists a broad population of job seekers secure employment. This system presumes that those it serves are coming to the job search with a base level of skills and the ability to utilize the tools and training opportunities the system provides, maintain a degree of self-direction in the job seeking process, understand and follow directions to report outcomes to the personnel, and pursue opportunities

independently. The role of these services is not to craft a job to suit the particular skills and abilities of an individual jobseeker.

DSHS/DVR serves a narrow constituency of jobseekers with significant disabilities who have barriers to employment. Customers interested in services must meet eligibility requirements and demonstrate they will benefit from services. A professionally trained Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor provides substantial counseling and guidance and helps the customer develop an individualized plan to identify and overcome disability-related barriers to their employment goal.

WorkSource Washington is a partnership of state and local government agencies, colleges and non-profit organizations that offer employment services for job seekers and businesses. WorkSource services are available in-person and online. Only a little more than one-third (n=231; 33.9%) of DSHS/DVR customer respondents report to have used WorkSource services. Of customers who have used WorkSource services, about 75% (n=155) report they were able to easily get around the WorkSource office and more than two-thirds (n=139; 68.8%) indicate they were able to fully participate in WorkSource services.

Of the customers who report they were not able to fully participate in WorkSource services (n=49; 24.3%), concerns related to WorkSource staffing and customer disability-related limitations were notable themes identified as these customer comments suggest, “no, not enough staff available to answer questions especially regarding tech questions/problems I had with forms” and “No, the services are not disabled friendly. You can’t get help filling out a form that is not ADA accessible, My workforce does not have adaptive computers with Dragon and screen reader”.

DSHS/DVR customer respondents were asked to select what WorkSource services they have received. The three most used WorkSource services are job listing, referrals, and hiring events (n=120), followed by resume and application help (n=84), and internet access for job searches (n=80).

Overall, the quality rating of WorkSource services reported by customers (n=224) is “Acceptable” with a mean score of 3.66 on a five-point rating scale: 1=Very Poor, 2=Poor, 3=Acceptable, 4=Good, 5=Very Good. Displayed another way, DSHS/DVR customers rate the quality of WorkSource services as “Very Good” (n=71; 32%), followed by “Acceptable” (n=60; 27%), “Good” (n=58; 26%), “Poor” (n=20; 9%), and “Very Poor” (n=15; 6%).

When questioned about the effectiveness of WorkSource service delivery for people with disabilities and their partnerships with DSHS/DVR, key informants highlighted the following points:

- Many of the respondents indicated that the relationship between DSHS/DVR and WorkSource programs is solid and that WIOA has strengthened and institutionalized this partnership.
- WorkSource locations still struggle to effectively serve individuals who have disabilities and many times over-rely on referrals to DSHS/DVR to address them.
- Co-location of DSHS/DVR staff at WorkSource locations has been extremely important to the partnership and effective service delivery, although there are still considerable inconsistencies in the quality of those relationships from location to location across the state.
- Both partners could benefit from increased awareness and deeper education about their respective systems of service delivery.

**Human Services Agencies:** Several areas are reported by DSHS/DVR staff to need improvement in relation to DSHS/DVR’s partnership with other human services agencies to support high quality services. Housing topped the list (n=64), followed by community mental health (n=56), independent living (n=48), parole and probation/corrections/juvenile rehabilitation (n=46), Social Security Administration (SSA)

(*n*=42), and substance abuse (*n*=40). Others include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (*n*=34), Aging and Long-term Support (*n*=34), Veterans Administration (*n*=34), Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) (*n*=33), and Services for the Blind (*n*=32).

**Partnership with Department of Services for the Blind:** Of the 90 staff respondents, DSHS/DVR staff were about split in their rating of service coordination quality on cases shared with the Department of Services for the Blind (DSB). About 51% rate the quality of service coordination on cases shared with DSB as “Okay” (*n*=25) or “Needs Improvement” (*n*=21), whereas almost 49% rate the quality of service coordination on cases shared with DSB as “Good” (*n*=38) or “Excellent” (*n*=6). Overall, staff report the average service coordination quality rating or mean score is 2.32 or “Okay”. Twenty-eight DSHS/DVR staff made comments to explain their “Needs improvement” response. The main theme that emerged was related to the need to improve agency collaboration.

**Developmental Disabilities Administration:** Of the 92 who responded, the majority DSHS/DVR staff (just under 70%) rate the quality of service coordination on cases shared with DDA/County Developmental Disabilities agencies as “Good” (*n*=46) or “Excellent” (*n*=18), whereas about 30% report the quality of service coordination on cases shared with DDA/County Developmental Disabilities agencies as “Okay” (*n*=17) or “Needs Improvement” (*n*=11). Overall, staff report the average service coordination quality rating or mean score is 2.77 or “Okay”. Twenty DSHS/DVR staff made comments to explain their “needs improvement” response. DVR/DDA communication and coordination that involve DDA/DVR monitoring and support plans were suggested by staff.

**Mental Health/Behavioral Health:** Of the 94 who responded, 67% of DSHS/DVR staff rate the quality of service coordination on cases shared with mental health/behavioral health agencies as “Okay” (*n*=37) or “Needs Improvement” (*n*=26). Conversely, only about 33% of DSHS/DVR staff rate the quality of service coordination on cases shared with mental health/behavioral health agencies as “Good” (*n*=25) or “Excellent” (*n*=6). Overall, staff report the average service coordination quality rating or mean score is 2.12 or “Okay”.

Thirty-one DSHS/DVR staff made comments to explain their “Needs Improvement” response. The two main themes that emerged were related to comments revolving around DSHS/DVR/mental health communication and service coordination, and the lack of mental health providers and staff capacity.

*(D) Youth with disabilities, including students with disabilities and their need for pre-employment transition services. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under IDEA.*

The Transition Self-Assessment Tool (TSAT) was administered by Washington State University during the 2021/2022 academic year to a representative sample of public high schools in Washington state (200 out of 538 or 37.2%). Valid and reliable data were collected from 238 individuals, mostly Special Education Teachers followed by District Special Education Directors. The TSAT provides evidence of the need for each type of pre-employment transition service (Pre-ETS) for potentially eligible students with disabilities. However, it does not assess the extent to which the five required services are available throughout the State. DSHS/DVR Pre-ETS services are available statewide. In addition, the TSAT assessed transition services in terms of accessibility, coordination with DSHS/DVR, and quality.

- 73% of the 97 school-based transition services listed on the TSAT were available in schools across the state. A similar percentage was reported last year.

- 26-50% of potentially eligible students with disabilities were participating in school-based transition services. Although not statistically tested, a visual and descriptive comparison suggests that more students accessed school-based transition services this year than they did last year.
- 1-25% of time, Pre-ETS provided were delivered in coordination with DSHS/DVR. A similar percentage was reported last year.
- On average, the quality of Pre-ETS was perceived as neither good nor poor. Although not statistically tested, a visual and descriptive comparison suggests that the perceived quality of the transition services was higher last year.

### **Need for Pre-ETS and DSHS/DVR Transition Services**

Several considerations arise from the TSAT results. First and foremost, the results substantiate an even greater need for access to and provision of Pre-ETS, and for DSHS/DVR to coordinate those services with school personnel statewide. (Poppen, 2022). A survey conducted by Seattle University between June and November 2021 affirms this finding.

Over 7000 16- to 21-year-old youth responded to the survey. Each respondent had had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) when they attended a Washington State high school and had graduated or left high school a year prior. The data revealed the following:

- When it comes to participation in higher education or employment, the respondents were outpaced by their peers, whose disability status was not reported. 27% of the respondents were in competitive employment and 21% were in other employment, compared to 80% of their peers across the country who were employed or looking for work (per U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).
- 17% of the respondents were enrolled in higher education (i.e., two-year or four-year college or university), compared to 60% of their peers in Washington state (per Education Research & Data Center). 30% of the respondents were not participating in postsecondary education or employment.

In addition, when the survey results were compared to the previous years, Washington state had a five-year pattern of declining participation by youth and young adults who had IEPs in the areas of higher education and competitive employment in the year following their high school experience. In fact, these respondents reported the highest number of non-participation in education or employment in the past five years.

Based on these comparisons, it is no surprise that youth who had IEPs or received special services or Section 504 services while in a Washington state high school did not earn as much as their peers during their first year post-high school. The median earnings of those who received special services was \$10.1K, compared to \$13.1K earned by those who did not receive special education. The median earnings of those who had a Section 504 plan (and were not enrolled in higher education) was \$12.1K compared to \$12.7K (Education Research & Data Center).

### **Qualitative Feedback on Transition Services**

Eighty-four DSHS/DVR staff provided responses when asked to describe what is working well with DSHS/DVR's partnership with schools (high school, post-secondary education) to support high quality services. Four themes emerged that include communication by specialized DSHS/DVR staff and liaisons with the most comments, followed by relationships, the work of regional transition consultants, and high

school staff knowledge. Eighty DSHS/DVR staff made comments related to areas they think need improvement in DSHS/DVR's partnership with schools (high school, post-secondary education) to support high quality services. They indicated that relationship development with schools, followed by communication, and providing training of DSHS/DVR Pre-ETS and transition process/service model were areas in need of improvement. Allocating for VRC transition specialty caseloads and the agency providing clear roles and procedures were additional themes that emerged from the data.

Key Informant Interviews included questions about the needs of transition aged youth, how well DSHS/DVR is working with educational partners to meet those needs, and information about Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). In these areas, participants most frequently raised concerns about the implementation and delivery of Pre-ETS. Several respondents mentioned that the contracting process for provision of Pre-ETS is problematic. In addition, respondents remarked that the Pre-ETS processes and required forms can be prohibitive for school districts, students, and families to successfully use and navigate.

Other transition comments addressed the need for DSHS/DVR to improve its relationships with schools and school staff and do a better job of educating students, families, and school personnel about what DSHS/DVR can do and who it serves. Respondents also indicated that there are often concerns about the supplanting of services as DSHS/DVR and schools are attempting to collaborate around provision of supports that both systems can offer. Interviewees indicated that many youth lack soft skills, confidence and self-advocacy, all characteristics that are critical for future success. Several respondents suggested that having more common verbiage and definitions among service providers would be helpful to the overall transition process.

***(2) Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the state.***

For the two-year period from July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022, Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) provided 100 percent of paid job placement and short-term job support services, and over 80 percent of assessments and supported employment services for customers who completed services. Nearly 60 percent of customers with a successful employment outcome received services from CRPs.

Most respondents across the surveys indicated a need to increase the availability of CRP services geographically, especially in rural areas. The contracting processes (including payment rates) may be deterrents to increasing CRPs across the state. Increasing training to CRP staff, along with improvement in the contracting process, might foster better relationships with CRPs and other partner organizations. In addition, increasing the availability of CRPs to provide Pre-ETS may influence improved services.

Key informants were asked about the quality and needs of existing Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) in Washington. The most common responses indicated that CRPs would benefit from additional training about DSHS/DVR processes, clients and expectations and that DSHS/DVR could benefit from training about the CRPs and their capabilities. Key informants also discussed the difficulty of CRPs to remain solvent and effective due to low and capped payment rates as well as barriers related to the contract and billing processes required by DSHS/DVR. CRPs also struggle with staff turnover due to the level of payment rates from DSHS/DVR and other governmental partners. Other comments included the need for more CRP resources in rural areas, better data sharing among service providers (including DSHS/DVR), and better alignment of disability and service-related definitions and verbiage.

CRPs lack the capacity to serve all the DVR customers referred due to staff shortages and hiring difficulties impacting CRP services. This may result in CRPs assisting supported employment customers to obtain employment for less hours than they have chosen to work so that CRP has capacity to support them on the job. DSHS/DVR Community Program Manager is working to simplify the contracting process to limit the required documents for CRPs who have historically contracted with DSHS/DVR.

Improvements made: In 2023 rates for CRP services were increased by seven percent across all services, and a rate study has been launched to inform our rate setting process and policy. Our goal is to consistently assess if the rate DSHS/DVR pays is adequate to reimburse CRPs for the work they do, as well as plan periodic rate increases between study years.

In July 2023, DSHS/DVR introduced several new bonuses to incentivize high quality outcomes. These bonuses will be paid to CRPs providing Job Placement Services when they assist customers in obtaining high wage employment, employment in rural areas, and if they achieve the placement rapidly (within 60 days of start of service).

Also in 2023, DSHS/DVR added 11 CRPs across the state when the new contract was initiated in July. Some contractors also chose not to renew their contracts, and DSHS/DVR currently has 111 CRPs on contract.

### C. Goals, Priorities, and Strategies

**Section 101(a)(15) and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe the goals and priorities of the State in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs. The goals and priorities are based on (1) the most recent CSNA, including any updates; (2) the State’s performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and (3) other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107 of the Rehabilitation Act. VR agencies must—**

- 1. Describe how the SRC and the VR agency jointly developed and agreed to the goals and priorities and any revisions; and**
- 2. Identify measurable goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs and the basis for selecting the goals and priorities (e.g., CSNA, performance accountability measures, SRC recommendations, monitoring, other information). As required in section 101(a)(15)(D), (18), and (23), describe under each goal or priority, the strategies or methods used to achieve the goal or priority, including as applicable, description of strategies or methods that—**
  - (A) Support innovation and expansion activities.
  - (B) Overcome barriers to accessing VR and supported employment services.
  - (C) Improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, post secondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services); and
  - (D) Improve the performance of the VR and Supported Employment programs in assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment outcomes.



*List and number each goal/priority, noting the basis, and under each goal/priority, list and number the strategies to achieve the goal/priority.*

## **Goals, Priorities, and Strategies**

### **Innovation and Expansion Activities**

DSHS/DVR plans to use Innovation and Expansion funds for the following activities:

- Operating support for the Washington State Rehabilitation Council and the Washington State Independent Living Council.
- Contract for the Washington Occupation/Career Information System to provide career and education information to DSHS/DVR customers to help determine a viable vocational goal and to allow customers to use and store information about their career and educational research.
- Contract with the University of Washington for the Washington Assistive Technology Act Program to provide access to assistive technology devices to DSHS/DVR customers.

### **Goal One: Highly Engaged, Diverse, and Skilled Team**

Goal one priorities reflect CSNA results, internal case review results, staff and stakeholder input which challenge DSHS/DVR to provide DSHS/DVR staff with clear performance expectations, training, and working conditions that support their success.

Measures that will be used to assess progress towards this goal include:

- Supervisors complete monthly case reviews to assess compliance with standards and best practice implementation
- Trainees meet post-training competency standards for IPE and eligibility determination timeliness

To achieve this goal, DSHS/DVR establishes the following priorities and strategies:

1. DSHS/DVR staff achieve and maintain mastery in their work.
  - a. Continue delivering foundational and practical training for field staff through internal training team, and appropriate vendors.
  - b. Continue onboarding efforts for all new staff, including government-to-government relations and working with American Indian and Alaska Native customers.
  - c. Implement role-specific and topic-specific training as needed, including supported employment best practices and resources.
  - d. Strengthen DSHS/DVR knowledge and application of transition and pre-employment transition services, best practices, and strategies that support positive outcomes.
  - e. Ensure Equity Diversity Access and Inclusion (EDAI) are a key piece of every training. Utilize an EDAI lens to develop and deliver training, and build a more accessible, inclusive, and equitable community.
2. DSHS/DVR excels in key performance indicators.
  - a. Within our new case management and enterprise performance management systems, establish, track, and monitor key performance measures for all levels of the agency using reports/dashboards easily accessible to staff at all levels.
  - b. Evaluate, monitor, and coach staff using performance reports. Ensure staff understand program measures and performance targets and the relationship to case practice. Review reports with staff routinely and identify improvement needs and strategies.



- c. Utilize staff expertise and feedback, subject matter experts, and partners to continue building a culture of continuous improvement, innovation, and collaboration across DSHS/DVR.
- 3. DSHS/DVR is an employer of choice.
  - a. Implement the strategies and action items adopted from DSHS/DVR's recruitment and retention plan to address staffing trends, turnover, and recruitment of under-represented groups among staff, including American Indian/Alaska Native counselors.
  - b. Maintain options for telework and flexible work schedules and explore options like internship opportunities.
  - c. Using caseload and fiscal forecasting, analyze the need for additional FTEs, pay scale adjustments, and retention incentives and the fiscal impact of implementing any changes in these areas.

### **Goal Two: Safe, Efficient and Secure Operations**

Goal two reflects DSHS/DVR's commitment to improving the systems and practices that support DSHS/DVR staff and safe and secure operations, and in turn, affect customer service. This goal emerged from a State Plan workshop with the WSRC and DSHS/DVR staff.

Measures that will be used to assess progress towards this goal include:

- Hold monthly Business Reviews with leadership and program managers to review progress and identify areas in need of improvement
- Complete analyses and management reports needed for problem solving and performance and compliance monitoring

To achieve this goal, DSHS/DVR establishes the following priorities:

1. Establish a data-based reporting framework that supports routine review of program progress and service quality and informs decisions and improvements at all levels.
  - a. Within our new case management and enterprise performance management systems, build reports/dashboards for DSHS/DVR staff with easy access to performance data at the statewide, regional, unit, and office levels.
  - b. Develop an informed decision-making model based on the quarterly DSHS/DVR customer satisfaction survey information.
2. DSHS/DVR staff have modern, user-friendly tools that streamline the vocational rehabilitation service model and enhance customer service experience and outcomes.
  - a. Continue implementation of new electronic case management system to include features such as vendor portal, management reports, and system improvements. Maximize usability and efficiency of the updated case management system.
  - c. Complete implementation of updated internal DSHS/DVR website, including transfer of appropriate information, archiving unused and redundant information, and decommissioning the old internal DSHS/DVR website called iDVR.
  - c. Streamline electronic signature and electronic forms for core VR processes including transition and pre-employment transition services.
  - d. Establish a formal IT portfolio management process to include a dashboard that allows staff to see how IT projects are prioritized.
3. DSHS/DVR will maintain a safe and accessible work environment to ensure staff and visitors remain safe and secure and business operations are maintained and can recover quickly.
  - a. Develop an emergency preparedness and recovery plan for all DSHS/DVR standalone facilities, consistent with DSHS and other state policies. Include accident prevention, emergency response and worksite physical security in the scope of the plan.

- b. Develop and implement a training plan to address emergency preparedness and recovery operations at DSHS/DVR and co-located facilities. Provide reports on training completion to supervisors.
- d. Communicate regularly with staff about workplace safety, updates to safety plans and training requirements and opportunities.

### **Goal Three: Customer Service Excellence**

Goal three reflects DSHS/DVR's focus on providing customer service excellence, including communication, provision of services, and hardware and software necessary to participate effectively in vocational rehabilitation services. Based on Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) and Customer Satisfaction Survey findings and partner input, this goal prioritizes the importance of providing quality customer service every time.

Measures that will be used to assess progress towards this goal include:

- Increase customer satisfaction rate
- Increase timely completion of individual plans for employment
- Increase referrals of customers who identify as American Indian or Alaska Native to Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs

To achieve this goal, DSHS/DVR establishes the following priorities:

1. Customers experience timely, continuous progress throughout the VR process.
  - a. Identify and address barriers to timely services and continuous customer engagement practices.
  - b. Review and modify current case transfer approach to reduce the impact to customers' case progress when staff transitions, vacancies, or any other case impacts occur.
  - c. Integrate minimum standard for customer contact as a performance measure. Continue customer response standard to support timely service delivery.
2. Individuals with disabilities have just and equitable access to DSHS/DVR services.
  - a. Continue to improve access to DSHS/DVR services using technology, mobile service locations, translation and interpreter services, transportation services, remote service access and virtual access, and other accommodations.
  - b. Develop a DSHS/DVR outreach plan targeting unserved and underserved populations in local communities who may not be familiar with DSHS/DVR services. Include customer success stories and communication access (which could include language access and interpreting services) in this outreach plan to promote effective engagement from all possible customers of DSHS/DVR. Ensure all field staff are trained to implement the outreach plan.
  - c. Strengthen information and referral for general and supported employment customers who need basic services and support to engage effectively with DSHS/DVR and to facilitate their access to workforce development programs.
  - d. Ensure regular completion of internal 7.01 Government-to-Government trainings for all staff. Develop and encourage additional training resources and opportunities for staff to support cultural humility when working with American Indian and/or Alaska Native customers and partners.
  - e. Include Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs in efforts to collect community needs information for the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

#### **Goal Four: Successful Customer Outcomes**

Goal four reflects DSHS/DVR's focus on providing high-quality services that result in high-quality employment outcomes. Based on Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) findings and partner input, this goal prioritizes the importance of supporting customers in high-quality employment which offers the pay and benefits that support financial security and stability.

Measures that will be used to assess progress towards this goal include:

- Increase the percent of DVR participants who achieve successful employment outcomes
- Increase the number of customers enrolled in post-secondary education or training

To achieve this goal, DSHS/DVR establishes the following priorities:

1. DSHS/DVR customers achieve employment in living wage jobs with benefits.
  - a. Increase percentage of customers with IPEs that include job goals leading to self-sufficiency/financial security (at least 200% of the federal poverty level or greater, based on job type, wages, hours worked per week).
  - b. Identify career pathways and increase the percentage of customers with IPEs that include post-secondary training and apprenticeships related to employment in their field of study. Support staff in providing these services by providing training to help VRCs better understand how to conduct appropriate vocational assessment and identify vocational goals and simplifying the financial aid process to make it easier to identify unmet need.
  - c. Assist staff in understanding and developing effective job search and job placement strategies, and tools that are readily available to all customers at the time they are job ready.
2. Students are better prepared to pursue career pathways and job goals leading to financial security after high school.
  - a. Implement transition and pre-employment transition services program, policy, and procedure updates to support high quality outcomes for students and youth, including extended services for those who need supported employment. Streamline roles and responsibilities of staff and provide training and information to staff and partners.
  - b. Expand the scope and availability of pre-employment transition contractors to increase service options based on statewide needs assessment, school demographics, contract mapping data, and other available resources.
  - c. Engage with transition partners, students, and families earlier and work towards DSHS/DVR evidence-based transition planning and practices in alignment of IEP and High School and Beyond Plan goals.
  - d. Increase regional collaboration with individual school districts and tribal education agencies to identify and address gaps in services and Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities.

#### **Goal Five: Strong Business, Partner, and Community Relationships**

Goal five priorities will improve outcomes for individuals with disabilities served by Washington's workforce development system, as well as other agency partners and DSHS/DVR service providers. As a core WIOA program, DSHS/DVR will contribute its expertise and strengths to maximize outcomes for individuals with disabilities and business customers. These priorities align with the strategic and operational elements of this Combined State Plan and reflect the needs of individuals with disabilities served system wide.

Measures that will be used to assess progress towards this goal include:

- Increase the number of business engagement services
- Establish key performance indicators for Community Rehabilitation Programs.

To achieve this goal, DSHS/DVR establishes the following priorities:

1. Strengthen communication, coordination, and collaboration with partners that deliver benefits to customers.
  - a. Engage with CRPs to encourage higher quality customer outcomes and utilize CRP incentives and rewards.
  - b. Collaborate with CRPs and identify key performance indicators for high quality outcomes.
  - c. Collaborate with the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery to fully implement the Foundational Community Supports inter-local agreement statewide and provide training to relevant staff to meet customer needs for supported employment.
  - d. Increase collaboration between DSHS/DVR and DSHS' Community Service Office to improve understanding of services available to mutual customers.
  - e. Collaborate with Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, Workforce Development Councils, and WorkSource leadership to increase WorkSource staff capacity and effectiveness in assisting people with disabilities with job search activities.
  - f. Collaborate with tribal vocational rehabilitation partners to fully implement the Statewide Cooperative Agreement and provide training to staff.
2. Formalize and implement targeted business engagement efforts.
  - a. Continue outreach and training for staff and partners to understand business engagement staff roles, responsibilities, and support services.
  - b. Implement statewide plan establishing expectations and measure outcomes for the business engagement program.
  - c. Provide technical assistance to employers, partners, and staff on topics such as the use of natural supports, EDAI, and disability etiquette in the workplace.
  - d. Provide candidate (VR customer) referrals to employers to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

#### D. Evaluation and Reports of Progress

***For the most recently completed program year, provide an evaluation and report of progress for the goals or priorities, including progress on the strategies under each goal or priority, applicable to that program year. Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe:***

##### ***(1) Progress in achieving the goals and priorities identified for the VR and Supported Employment Programs***

#### **Progress in Achieving Goals and Priorities**

##### ***Goal One: Customer Service and Outcomes are our Highest Priority***

**Goal One, Priority One: Customers experience timely, continuous progress throughout the VR process.**

**Strategy 1: Identify and address barriers to timely services and continuous progress for customers throughout the VR process.**

- It was identified that obtaining signatures have been a barrier to timely service delivery when working with customers virtually. DocuSign, electronic signature and forms management software, was procured and rolled out for staff use with customers and partners.
- It was identified that inconsistent benefits planning practices can create barriers to continuous progress for customers. A new process is being piloted to ensure that benefits planners are connecting with customers prior to IPE development and continue to be available while customers move through the VR process. This allows customers to make informed decisions about working early in the process, which increases the efficiency of service delivery.

**Strategy 2: Establish an approach for reducing the impact to customers' case progress when staff transitions and vacancies occur.**

- Regional Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Float positions were established as a strategy to reduce the impact to customers' case progress when vacancies occur. These VRCs work with customers in locations with staff capacity concerns. They provide services remotely and in person, traveling within the region as necessary to meet customers' needs.
- DSHS/DVR also implemented automatic replies to outgoing staff emails, so customers know who to contact when their counselor has left the agency.
- Part of the work of implementing a new case management system was to ensure a standard operating procedure for contacting customers when their case is being transferred. The new database has capability to automatically produce letters for customers, which can be processed and mailed by support personnel to ensure timely communication. Though functional improvements continue, the case management system is in use and work is being done to review the operating procedures, processes, and checklists with the goal of aligning a non-paper procedure with field practice and the new management system that can be trained to all staff.

**Strategy 3: Integrate customer contact and response standards as performance measures for VR counseling staff.**

- Aside from ongoing messaging and training to staff containing the department-expected minimum response times for any communication received, this strategy was not implemented in PY 2022. Although there are best practices and guidelines for timely response, these have not been integrated into formal performance expectations for VR counseling staff.

**Goal One, Priority Two: DSHS/DVR customers achieve employment in living wage jobs with benefits.**

**Strategy 1: Increase rate of customers with IPEs that include job goals leading to self-sufficiency/financial security (at least 200% of the federal poverty level or greater, based on job type, wages, hours worked per week).**

- A specific strategy was not implemented in PY 2022 for the purpose of increasing the rate of participants with job goals leading to self-sufficiency. However, a data sharing agreement was established to begin tracking the percentage of participants exiting DSHS/DVR services with incomes at or above 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL). There is a lag with the availability of this data, but the results indicate that this is trending up.

**Strategy 2: Identify career pathways and increase the rate of customers with IPEs that include postsecondary training resulting in employment in their field of study.**

- There has not been an establishment of a consistent statewide process or expectation for identifying career pathways and increasing the rate of customers with IPEs that include postsecondary trainings. However, there has been more of an emphasis on supporting customers to advance in their career goals and efforts to coordinate with workforce partners to explore training opportunities for in-demand career pathways.

**Strategy 3: Develop effective job search and job placement assistance and/or services that are readily available to all customers at the time they are job ready.**

- This strategy was evaluated in the 2022 State Plan Update, with no additional comments for PY 2022.

**Goal One, Priority Three: Students are better prepared to engage in VR services after high school.**

**Strategy 1: Pre-ETS are available in all areas based on statewide needs assessment, school demographics, and contract mapping data.**

- Pre-Employment Transition Services staff and DSHS/DVR's Tribal Relations Administrator collaborated to provide outreach to Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs and schools in order to elevate collaboration and Pre-ETS services to eligible American Indian/Alaska Native students.

**Strategy 2: Lead collaboration with individual school districts to identify gaps in services and CTE opportunities.**

and

**Strategy 3: Engage with transition staff, students, and families earlier and work toward alignment of IEP and High School and Beyond Plan goals.**

- These strategies were not formally implemented in PY 2022; however, DSHS/DVR initiated a contract with Synergy Consulting Partners for technical assistance in improving Pre-ETS operations. This included the completion of a gap analysis, recommendations, and a plan of action. Work groups were established to focus on specific deliverables which will contribute to the future state of the Pre-ETS program, and this work is still underway and scheduled to continue through PY 2023.

**Goal One, Priority Four: Individuals with disabilities have equitable access to DSHS/DVR services.**

**Strategy 1: Improve access to DSHS/DVR services through the use of technology, mobile service locations, translation and interpreter services, transportation services, or other accommodations.**

- Since the reopening of DSHS/DVR offices through the pandemic recovery period, DSHS/DVR has maintained a hybrid approach to serving customers. This allows for customer choice in receiving services remotely when it meets their needs, while ensuring that customers who don't have access to technology are able to meet with staff in the office.

- The rollout of DocuSign has improved access to DSHS/DVR services for customers who choose to be served remotely or in a hybrid fashion.
- DSHS/DVR Policy and Customer Relations partnered to update the Washington Administrative Code rules and information in the DSHS/DVR Customer Handbook and ensured digital accessibility of the pdf version. This helped to improve customer self-advocacy through the VR process.

**Strategy 2: Develop a DSHS/DVR outreach plan targeting under-represented populations in local communities that may be unaware of DSHS/DVR services.**

- The Washington State DSHS Administrative Policy 7.01 defines the department’s commitment to consultation with federally recognized tribes and to confer with Urban Indian Organizations to ensure quality and comprehensive service delivery to American Indian and Alaska Native customers. Outreach goals and objectives were developed by DSHS/DVR and submitted to the Washington State DSHS Office of Indian Policy and include outreach goals and objectives to raise awareness of DSHS/DVR services and increase service delivery to this under-represented population.
- DVR Tribal Relations facilitated a core advisory team comprised of subject matter experts from the Client Assistance Program, Department of Services from the Blind, Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs, Pro-Equity Anti Racism staff, Business Management Modernization Project staff, and VRC tribal liaisons to review and make recommendations for improving service delivery to American Indian and Alaska Native customers.

**Strategy 3: Strengthen information and referral for those who need basic services and support to engage effectively with DSHS/DVR and to facilitate access to workforce development programs.**

- DSHS/DVR’s business team is closely aligned with WorkSource one-stop centers and community partners across the state and provide referrals and collaboration on inclusive hiring and resource events.
- Many of the WorkSource one-stop centers across the state have DSHS/DVR staff members working on site on a regular schedule. This has led to strengthened partnerships and collaboration which has helped to better facilitate DSHS/DVR customer access to workforce development programs and basic services provided by workforce partners.

***Goal Two: Motivate and Inspire High Performing Staff***

**Goal Two, Priority One: DSHS/DVR staff achieve mastery in their work.**

**Strategy 1: Deliver foundational and practical training for field staff through VR Institute and internal trainers.**

- In addition to activities noted in the 2022 State Plan Update, the DSHS/DVR training team has worked hard to develop a comprehensive list of on-demand virtual trainings available to staff. The topics include supported employment, financial statements, vocational evaluation, application and intake, and case closure. Additional training course topics have included customer service, eligibility, assistive technology, and self-employment.

**Strategy 2: Expand new VRC cohort program to all regions to reinforce VR counseling principles and practices among newer counseling staff.**

- The DSHS/DVR training team developed a comprehensive field staff onboarding curriculum focused on developing the foundational knowledge and skills that new Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Rehabilitation Technicians need to meet competency requirements. This is required for all new field staff and is provided virtually throughout the first full month of employment.
- The DSHS/DVR training team in also developing a comprehensive supervisory onboarding curriculum focused on developing and enhancing foundational supervisory expertise and skills new Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisors need to meet competency requirements.

**Strategy 3: Strengthen DSHS/DVR knowledge and application of transition planning and practices that support positive outcomes.**

- The DSHS/DVR training team developed a foundational on-demand transition training in Program Year 2022.

**Goal Two, Priority Two: DSHS/DVR excels in key performance indicators.**

**Strategy 1: Establish, track, and monitor key performance measures for all levels of the agency using reports/dashboards easily accessible to staff at all levels.**

- DSHS/DVR implemented enterprise performance management software called Results which tracks key performance measures and performance indicators. Results displays measures using dashboards which are easily accessible to all staff. Results is also used to track projects, such as those related to State Plan strategies, and links them to the performance measures to easily see how strategic efforts are contributing to those measures.
- DSHS/DVR is also in the process of developing needed reports through the newly launched case management database, known as Waves.

**Strategy 2: Evaluate, monitor, and coach staff using performance reports.**

- Performance reports within Power Bi were used to monitor and provide monthly coaching to Vocational Rehabilitation counseling staff, focusing on timeliness of services, such as time to eligibility and time to plan. This helps to direct conversations with VR staff which encourage practices which contribute to more meaningful and rapid engagement. Monthly reviews of authorizations for payment are also completed for each caseload to ensure accuracy and appropriateness of caseload expenditures.

**Strategy 3: Build capacity and skills throughout DSHS/DVR for continuous improvement and innovation.**

- Training opportunities have been provided to staff to build skills for continuous improvement and innovation. Training has included Six Sigma Yellow Belt, which was provided to members of executive leadership and program managers, as well as Transformational Rehabilitation Leadership Training provided by the National Training Center for Transformational Rehabilitation Leadership, leading to the Certified Rehabilitation Leader certifications.
- There has been a focus on increasing staff awareness of tribal culture and American Indian/Alaska Native topics. Activities and initiatives have included weekly articles to staff and presentations from American Indian/Alaska Native speakers during Native



American Heritage month, a monthly Talking Circle for staff to learn and share best practices when working with federally recognized tribes and American Indian/Alaska Native customers, training led by DSHS/DVR's Tribal Administrator and staff with tribal lived experience, and a focus on tribal relations and government-to-government activities during new employee onboarding.

**Goal Two, Priority Three: DSHS/DVR is an employer of choice.**

**Strategy 1: Develop a recruitment and retention plan to address staff patterns, turnover, and recruitment of under-represented groups among staff. Plan will acquaint managers with targeted recruitment strategies, reasonable accommodations, training and cultural competencies that foster a diverse and inclusive work environment.**

- DSHS/DVR conducted outreach to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and made presentations to students at HBCU's VR or equivalent programs about career opportunities in vocational rehabilitation.
- Efforts have been taken to increase training opportunities and remove barriers per position classification, allowing staff to participate in training and development opportunities intended for others within different positions.

**Strategy 2: Increase options for telework, flexible work schedules, and part-time.**

- This strategy was evaluated in the 2022 State Plan Update, with no additional comments for PY 2022.

**Strategy 3: Adopt and implement a staff recognition approach.**

- A workgroup was formed to develop an employee recognition approach which was rolled out to all staff. An Employee Recognition Guide was developed and shared with staff, with an expectation that each unit adopt at least one recognition activity monthly. Included in the guide is support for implementation of monthly activities, as well as many examples of activity options to be considered.
- DSHS/DVR also gave employee recognition awards at the DSHS/DVR in-service to nominated staff who exemplified the department's five values: Honesty and Integrity, Pursuit of Excellence, Open Communication, Diversity and Inclusion, and Commitment to Service.

**Goal Three: DSHS/DVR Collaborates with Businesses and Partners that Deliver Benefits to Customers**

**Goal Three, Priority One: Strengthen communication and collaboration with partners that deliver benefits to customers.**

**Strategy 1: Collaborate with CRPs on contract changes that incent/reward higher quality outcomes based on established outcome measures.**

- Within PY 2022, a decision was made to increase Community Rehabilitation Provider fees by 7% and initiate bonuses for high quality employment outcomes, such as rapid placement, high wage placement, and rural placement, effective 7/1/23.
- A CRP/IL rate study was initiated to ensure CRPs are fairly compensated for the work they perform.

**Strategy 2: Increase collaboration with and understanding of services available to DSHS/DVR-Community Service Office mutual customers.**

- DSHS/DVR partnered with the Community Services Division to create an updated DSHS/DVR-CSD Warm Handoff Memorandum of Understanding. Regular meetings with CSD and DSHS/DVR leadership were initiated to ensure services were being provided and coordinated effectively. Updated training was created and provided to all DSHS/DVR staff to ensure effective implementation of the new process.
- Efforts have been made to work on programming within DSHS/DVR's new case management system, Waves, in order to better track CSD referrals and provide data outlined in the DSHS/DVR-CSD MOU.

**Strategy 3: Collaborate with DBHR to fully implement FCS inter-local agreement statewide.**

- This strategy was evaluated in the 2022 State Plan Update.
- In addition to the implementation of the FCS inter-local agreement, DSHS/DVR participates in a quarterly FCS steering committee and Olmstead committee focusing on increasing employment outcomes for individuals with behavioral health and physical conditions, such as traumatic brain injuries, that qualify for FCS supported employment services.

**Strategy 4: Collaborate with WorkSource leadership to increase WorkSource staff capacity and effectiveness in assisting people with disabilities with job search activities.**

- DSHS/DVR Business Specialists have attended the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act 101 and Washinton's One-Stop System Training in order to develop foundational knowledge necessary to effectively engage with workforce partners and work with co-enrolled customers.
- Key DSHS/DVR staff were approved to attend the Workforce Washington Association conference, which provided an opportunity to collaborate with Workforce Development Council staff and WorkSource leadership on job search strategies and integration approaches to better serve co-enrolled customers.

**Goal Three, Priority Two: Formalize and implement targeted business engagement efforts.**

**Strategy 1: Define business engagement staff roles and responsibilities for education, training, and outreach to employers.**

- This strategy was evaluated in the 2022 State Plan Update, with no additional comments for PY 2022.

**Strategy 2: Develop statewide plan establishing expectations and measure outcomes for the business engagement program.**

- This strategy was evaluated in the 2022 State Plan Update, with no additional comments for PY 2022.

**Strategy 3: Provide technical assistance to employers on the use of natural supports and disability DEI and etiquette in the workplace.**

- DSHS/DVR's Supported Employment Program Manager provides technical assistance on the use of natural supports in the workplace to state agencies participating in the Supported Employment in State Government Program.

- The DSHS/DVR Business Team produced a Webinar for statewide HR Managers received recertification credits with the HR Certification Institute and the Society for Human Resource Management, including content focused on enforcement priorities, registered apprenticeship programs, early return to work, stay at work, recruiting diverse talent, disability inclusion and disability etiquette.
- The DSHS/DVR Business Team offers businesses training on a variety of topics related to best practices in hiring, retaining, and promoting people with disabilities, including trainings on disability etiquette, disability awareness, section 508 and accessibility training, tax credits, 503 rules, and reasonable accommodations.

**Goal Four: Improve DSHS/DVR's System & Performance**

**Goal Four, Priority One: Establish a reporting framework that informs decisions and improvements at all levels.**

**Strategy 1: Build reports/dashboards for DSHS/DVR managers with easy access to performance data at the statewide, regional, unit, and office levels.**

- In addition to the development of reports identified in the 2022 State Plan Update, enhancement of the Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor coaching tool was completed, an emergency management dashboard was built, and An IPE eligibility overview dashboard was built. A new Business Engagement tracking tool was created which will be migrated into DSHS/DVR's new case management system.
- The Tribal Administrator completed the refinement of quarterly reports to offer more meaningful referral, tribal affiliation, and American Indian/Alaska Native waitlist data for DSHS/DVR managers and Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation program directors.

**Strategy 2: Develop a reporting framework and database for overall agency reporting.**

- This continues to be in development but will be streamlined through the development of DSHS/DVR's new case management system, Waves. This is an ongoing project in partnership with Technology Innovation Administration.
- Partnerships were built to allow for data transfers between state and federal agencies for enhanced data capabilities.

**Strategy 3: Full implementation of DSHS/DVR customer satisfaction survey.**

- This strategy was evaluated in the 2022 State Plan Update, with no additional comments for PY 2022.

**Goal Four, Priority Two: DSHS/DVR Staff have modern, user-friendly tools that streamline their work.**

**Strategy 1: Modernize DSHS/DVR's electronic case management system.**

- The work to roll out DSHS/DVR's new electronic case management system has been ongoing throughout this performance period. The initial goal of launching Waves on July 1, 2022, was delayed due to the need to ensure accessibility. DSHS/DVR is working with the vendor to remediate the accessibility issues and pushed the launch date to October 31, 2023.
- DSHS/DVR also rolled out an electronic document management system, Laserfiche in order to fully transition to electronic customer files. Staff have been given the ability to upload documents directly into the electronic case record. Work has also been

completed to integrate Laserfiche and Waves via API so that case file documentation can be accessed through the new case management system.

**Strategy 2: Update and enhance the content and usability of the iDVR website to provide staff with easy access to clear, up-to-date program, policy, and administrative reference guides information.**

- A new communication platform, VOICE, was developed within SharePoint, leading to easier access to program, policy, and administrative information all in one location. Initial efforts have focused on building sites for the Customer Service Manual, Standard Operating Procedures, Equity, Diversity, Access, and Inclusion. Ongoing site updates include training resources, tribal relations, and operations.

**Strategy 3: Implement new application to document Pre-ETS participant information and consent to participate in services and allow use of personal data for service delivery and reporting.**

- This functionality is intended to be implemented in DSHS/DVR’s new case management system, Waves.
- Related projects have included building a GIS school location map which includes universities, private, technical, and public schools, as well as a web tool to manage school locations.

**Strategy 4: Establish a formal IT portfolio management process to include a dashboard that allows staff to see how IT projects are prioritized.**

- An IT portfolio management process was built; however, this process is currently on hold. DSHS/DVR’s IT team has been matrixed into a larger, DSHS-wide IT administration. Transition to a merged portfolio process is pending.

***(2) Performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA for the most recently completed program year, reflecting actual and negotiated levels of performance. Explain any discrepancies in the actual and negotiated levels; and***

In PY 22, DSHS/DVR missed the target performance rate for Credential Attainment Rate by a large margin. We have identified contributing factors related to lack of understanding about requirements, case management system design, and reporting errors. We have undertaken a performance improvement project to ensure that staff understand requirements and data are appropriately captured and reported. Though Measurable Skill Gains met the target, the improvement project is expected to improve performance on this measure as well.

We will be undertaking an analysis of factors impacting Median Earnings, such as number of hours worked and job types, to better understand how we can improve in this area.

We are also establishing monitoring processes and lagging indicators to support early identification and intervention when measures are not on track.

| <b>Performance Indicators</b>          | <b>PY 2022 Negotiated Level</b> | <b>PY 2022 Actual Level</b> |
|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Employment (Second Quarter After Exit) | 44.0%                           | 45.3%                       |

|   |         |         |
|---|---------|---------|
| Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)      | 36.0%   | 34.4%   |
| Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit) | \$4,350 | \$3,915 |
| Credential Attainment Rate                  | 25.0%   | 14.5%   |
| Measurable Skill Gains Rate                 | 47.0%   | 51.8%   |

**(3) The use of funds reserved for innovation and expansion activities (sections 101(a)(18) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act) (e.g., SRC, SILC).**

DSHS/DVR used Innovation and Expansion funds for the following activities in Program Year 22:

- Operating support for the Washington State Rehabilitation Council and the Washington State Independent Living Council.
- Contract for the Washington Occupation/Career Information System to provide career and education information to DSHS/DVR customers to help determine a viable vocational goal and to allow customers to use and store information about their career and educational research.
- Contract with the University of Washington for the Washington Assistive Technology Act Program to provide access to assistive technology devices to DSHS/DVR customers.

| <b>Innovation and Expansion Activities Spending PY 2022 (July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023)</b> |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| Partnering Organization  | Amount              |
| Washington State Rehabilitation Council  | \$324,185.22        |
| Washington State Independent Living Council  | \$255,607.16        |
| Washington Occupational Information System   | \$27,430.40         |
| University of Washington   | \$63,694.74         |
| <b>Total Funds</b>   | <b>\$670,917.52</b> |

**E. Supported Employment Services**

**(1) Acceptance of Title VI Funds**

[ X ] VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.

**(2) If the VR agency has elected to receive title VI funds, Section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act requires VR agencies to include specific goals and priorities with respect to the distribution of title VI funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services. Describe the use of title VI funds and how they will be used in meeting the goals and priorities of the Supported Employment program.**

DSHS/DVR estimates the Title VI Supported Employment Grant will fund an estimated 800 customers annually who receive supported employment services through Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs), resulting in 400-500 supported employment outcomes per year. At these levels, DSHS/DVR estimates serving approximately 3,200 supported employment IPEs and producing 1,800 supported employment outcomes during Federal Program Years 2024 to 2027.

DSHS/DVR provides supported employment services primarily to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. DSHS/DVR and its partners continue to pursue innovative strategies to expand these services to other populations, as resources are comparatively scarce. Many individuals with disabilities would benefit from supported employment, yet do not have access to a long-term funding source for extended services. Through continued collaboration, innovative approaches, and the use of natural supports, DSHS/DVR and its partners will be able to expand the availability, quality, and scope of extended services for all individuals who require supported employment.

DSHS/DVR strategies for expanding the availability of supported employment services support the Division's overall goals of building a **Highly Engaged, Diverse, and Skilled Team** and **Strong Business, Partner, and Community Relationships**.

Specific strategies include the following:

- Participate in an interagency service committee, which supports initiatives to improve employment outcomes for persons living with developmental disabilities, mental health disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and traumatic brain injuries.
- Train staff and partners on Social Security Ticket to Work incentives, which includes Plan to Achieve Self Sufficiency (PASS Plan), to expand revenue sources.
- Provide staff training on the use of natural supports and other behavioral health treatment modalities that can be utilized for DSHS/DVR Supported Employment customers for extended services.
- Coordinate cross-program training opportunities on innovative supported employment strategies.
- Coordinate cross-agency program training opportunities on the FCS Individual Placement and Support evidence-based model and the DSHS/DVR HCA/DBHR Interlocal Agreement.
- Participate in the FCS Advisory Committee.

***(3) Supported employment services may be provided with title 1 or title VI funds following placement of individuals with the most significant disabilities in employment. In accordance with section 101(a)(22) and section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe the quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities; and the timing of transition to extended services.***

### **Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services**

Supported employment services are unduplicated services needed to support and maintain eligible customers with the most significant disabilities to retain their competitive employment. Supported employment services consist of:

1. Time-limited "ongoing" support services and other vocational rehabilitation services provided by DSHS/DVR.
2. Extended services provided by the long-term service provider when the customer's performance is stabilized on the job and the services DSHS/DVR provides have ended.

Time-limited support services are provided by DSHS/DVR under an IPE to assist customers eligible for supported employment to get a job and achieve stabilization on the job. Supported employment services are provided according to DSHS/DVR's policies and procedures and in accordance with cooperative agreements developed between DSHS/DVR and State, public, or private organizations that fund and/or provide extended services following the termination of DSHS/DVR time-limited services. Examples of extended services partners/ providers include, but are not limited to:

- County Developmental Disabilities
- Mental Health agencies
- Foundational Community Supports
- Social Security Work Incentives
- Trust Fund
- Natural supports such as family, co-workers, and employers

### **The Timing of Transition to Extended Services**

DSHS/DVR customers receiving supported employment services transition from time-limited ongoing support services to extended services when stable, satisfactory job performance is achieved. The timeframe for this transition is within 24 months of customers beginning employment unless a longer timeframe has been specified in the IPE. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act amends the Rehabilitation Act to permit DSHS/DVR to fund extended services for youth with the most significant disabilities for a period not to exceed four years or until age 25, whichever happens first. DSHS/DVR will fund extended services for youth with the most significant disabilities on a case-by-case basis.

***(4) Sections 101(a)(22) and 606(b)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act require the VR agency to describe efforts to identify and arrange, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services. The description must include extended services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including the provision of extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities in accordance with 34 CFR 363.4(a) and 34 CFR 361.5(c)(19)(v).***

### **Supported Employment Partners & Agreements**

DSHS/DVR identifies and makes arrangements with private non-profits (community rehabilitation programs/CRPs) as identified in the response to Description (e) Cooperative Agreements with Private Non-Profit Organizations, to provide supported employment services for individuals with most significant disabilities including youth.

DSHS/DVR collaborates with state and local entities including, but not limited to the DSHS Developmental Disabilities Administration (DSHS/DDA), Health Care Authority Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (HCA/DBHR), DSHS Aging and Long Term Support Administration (DSHS/AL TSA), the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, workforce development system, business partners, community behavioral health agencies, local education agencies, and local developmental disabilities employment providers to provide competitive integrated supported employment services to eligible individuals.

DSHS/DVR primarily provides supported employment services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and individuals with mental health disabilities. Of these two customer groups, individuals with developmental disabilities represent the majority of supported employment outcome. DSHS/DVR's success in serving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities is based on a long-standing relationship with the DSHS/Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). DDA is committed to funding extended services for all its clients who achieve a supported employment outcome through DSHS/DVR.

DSHS/DVR has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with DDA signed in 2018, renewed in 2021, and again in 2023. The agreement describes criteria and process for DSHS/DVR and DDA to provide seamless and consistent supported employment services statewide to mutual customers. It formalizes the referral procedures, has assigned liaison counselors in each DSHS/DVR office, and coordinates services that contribute to the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

For individuals with behavioral health conditions, DSHS/DVR's supported employment partner is the Health Care Authority (HCA) Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR)). DBHR's Foundational Community Supports (FCS) Supported Employment Program is available to address the employment resource needs of mutual DBHR and DSHS/DVR customers. DSHS/DVR completed an Interlocal Agreement (ILA) with DBHR which provides a collaborative framework for both agencies to provide employment services to individuals with behavioral health conditions. The ILA identifies shared eligibility criteria and defines roles and responsibilities for DSHS/DVR's Supported Employment Program and for DBHR's FCS Supported Employment Program.

DSHS/DVR continues to promote the use of Ticket to Work as a potential revenue source for developmental disability, behavioral health disability, and traumatic brain injury service providers to build their capacity for providing extended support services.

DSHS/DVR will collaborate with DSHS/AL TSA to explore the development of a cooperative agreement for individuals with physical impairments and long-term care needs, such as individuals with traumatic brain injuries and other significant disabilities, who require supported employment and are eligible for both AL TSA's FCS Program and DSHS/DVR services.

Many individuals with disabilities would benefit from supported employment, yet do not have access to a long-term funding source for extended services.

The State of Washington Health Care Authority was approved for the Medicaid Transformation Demonstration Foundational Community Supports Supported Employment in 2017. Effective July 1, 2023, the Medicaid Transformation Demonstration has been extended for another five years. FCS funds supported employment as a Medicaid service, expanding the availability of extended services to individuals who experience a wide array of significant disabilities.



## F. Annual Estimates

**Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require all VR agencies to annually conduct a full assessment of their resources and ability to serve all eligible individuals before the start of the Federal fiscal year. In accordance with 34 CFR § 361.29(b), annual estimates must include the following projections:**

### (1) Estimates for next Federal fiscal year—

#### (A) VR Program; and

| Priority Category (if applicable) | No. of Individuals Eligible for Services | No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program | Costs of Services using Title I Funds | No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable) |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1                                 | 7,970                                    | 7,970   | \$17,300,000                          | Not applicable   |
| 2                                 | 3,220                                    | 3,220   | \$7,000,000                           | Not applicable   |
| 3                                 | 1,800                                    | 990   | \$1,300,000                           | 810  |
| 4                                 | 600                                      | 245   | \$340,000                             | 355  |
| 5                                 | 680                                      | 390   | \$510,000                             | 290  |

#### (B) Supported Employment Program

| Priority Category (if applicable) | No. of Individuals Eligible for Services | No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment Program | Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds | No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable) |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Not Applicable                    | 800                                      | 800   | \$400,000  | Not Applicable   |

## G. Order of Selection

- The VR agency is **not** implementing an order of selection and all eligible individuals will be served.  
 The VR agency is implementing an order of selection with one or more categories closed.

### (1) Describe

#### (C) The justification for the order

This section was developed in consultation with the Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC) and the Client Assistance Program. DSHS-DVR has engaged community partners and the public to provide information about Order of Selection and address questions and concerns before implementation of the Order.

In August of 2024, DSHS/DVR provided public notice of its intent to amend the State Plan to implement an Order of Selection. Customers, tribal and community partners, and stakeholders were invited to submit comments and participate in a public meeting regarding implementation of an Order of Selection. On

September 16, 2024, DSHS/DVR and WSRC held a virtual public meeting to review the State Plan amendment, respond to questions, and engage in dialogue about the impact of Order of Selection on DSHS/DVR customers.

In accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, and its regulations, a designated state unit must implement an order of selection when there are insufficient resources to serve all eligible customers who apply for services.

DSHS/DVR has insufficient resources to serve all eligible customers. There are multiple factors contributing to the lack of resources leading to the need to close categories under the order of selection. They include:

- A projected reduction of \$7.5 million in available funds in FFY2025 for the vocational rehabilitation program in Washington. This is a result of continued reduced reimbursement from Social Security Administration (SSA) to DSHS-DVR and the anticipated flat funding of the Vocational Rehabilitation grant.
- Increased applicants for services
- Increased number of individuals in an individualized plan for employment
- Increased cost of services to program participants as a result of:
  - Rate increases to vendors
  - Increased number of program participants need assessments
  - Staff salary increases
- Individuals remaining in an individualized plan for employment longer as a result of activities like participation in post-secondary education which come with increased costs for tuition

Applicant and expenditure projections for FFY2025 indicate a shortage in funding making it necessary to implement an order of selection.

Upon learning that our Social Security Administration reimbursement would be \$3.5 million less than previous years and that the federal grant would be \$4 million less than anticipated, DSHS/DVR implemented a set of cost containment measures in areas where DSHS/DVR could immediately act, including staff travel, training, and non-direct service contracts. Those efforts are projected to save \$1.3 million in FFY 2025, leaving the need to save additional funds to meet the projected \$7.5 million funding gap. DSHS/DVR is under a hiring freeze for non-direct service positions. This will generate a small amount of savings, but it will be insufficient to address the funding gap. DSHS/DVR is also taking steps to maximize customer use of comparable benefits and least cost services.

DSHS-DVR received \$3.5 million less in Social Security Administration (SSA) reimbursement in 2024. The reduction in reimbursement resulted from a change in the SSA reimbursement requirements including timeframes for submitting requests as well as changes to the process for verifying wages earned by Ticket to Work program participants. SSA Ticket to Work previously allowed a cost reimbursement claim to be submitted, and if it was denied due to wages not being adequate after SSA review, DSHS-DVR had an unlimited timeframe to resubmit the cost reimbursement claim and could do so repeatedly until the claim was approved. In February 2024, SSA notified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies that starting in March 2024, VR agencies would only have 365 calendar days to resubmit a claim for cost reimbursement and could only do so one time. Because of this new policy, DSHS-DVR is submitting a lower volume of claims than in prior years and is strategically waiting to submit claims closer to the deadline in some cases to maximize approval outcomes for the first submittal. If the claim is denied, the 365-day resubmittal

window is extended out further. DSHS-DVR is working to update and improve its processes, but the decline in reimbursement is expected to continue.

Because the decline in program income for Social Security reimbursements is expected to persist into FFY2026 and FFY 2027 and cases in plan and case service expenditure growth is expected to continue to increase, DSHS/DVR has determined that closing categories 3, 4, and 5 is necessary. Taking this step in FFY2025 will impact fewer customers in the long run and allow the agency to manage within available resources. This decision ensures that customers currently in plan continue to be served. The Order of Selection will only impact new customers in the closed categories. DSHS/DVR expects to implement the Order of Selection as soon as February 2, 2025. Implementing closure of three categories now will help prevent closure of services to individuals found to be the most significantly disabled.

The fiscal status of the agency will be monitored on a monthly basis to determine if additional categories need to be closed in FFY2026 or to release customers from the waitlist should sufficient funds become available. If new applications or needs for services decline, opening closed categories will be a top priority.

DSHS/DVR will engage with SSA and available trainings to identify any opportunities to increase SSA reimbursements. If reallocation funds are available, DSHS/DVR will request additional funding to reduce the waiting list. Similarly, an increase in DSHS/DVR's base grant would allow more customers to be served promptly.

The following data supports our determination that we have insufficient resources:

- ***Increasing requests for vocational rehabilitation services***
  - Interest in DSHS/DVR services has grown since PY 2020 and returned to pre-pandemic levels. The number of applications increased from 3,904 to 5,613 from PY 2021 to PY 2022, a 44% increase. The volume of new applications began to slow in PY 2023. Projections indicate continued growth in PY 2024 but at a slower rate.
  - The upward trend in applications led to growth in the number of new plans for employment and total number of cases in plan during that period. New plans increased by 42% from PY 2021 to PY 2022. The number of new plans declined from 4,165 to 3,922 in PY 2023, due to a tapering of the growth in new applications in prior months and an increase in days to plan. The latter is a temporary variance related to technical issues and staff learning curve with the new case management system. DSHS/DVR projects 4,418 new plans to be completed in PY 2024, an increase from PY 2022 and PY 2023.
  - Cases are remaining in plan longer, resulting in higher overall participant caseloads. The total number of cases in plan increased from 9,225 in PY 2022 to 10,433 in PY 2023. The total number of customers in plan at the end of PY 2023 was 13% higher than the number at the end of PY 2022. The trend in increased time to case closure is expected to continue.
  
- ***Case service spending outpacing available funding***
  - Consistent with the growing number of customers in plan, DSHS-DVR has experienced increased expenditures throughout the agency. The average expenditure per plan has also consistently increased since the lowest point during the pandemic and is currently at an average of \$2,387 annually. From PY 2021 to PY 2023, case service expenditures grew by nearly

40%, from \$17.5 million to \$24.3 million. Spending is expected to increase by 17-18% in FFY 2025, based on the projected number of cases in plan and average amount spent per plan.

- **High staff turnover and vacancies**

- Staff capacity is a factor in DSHS/DVR's ability to provide quality services and manage intake and services for new customers. High staff turnover and vacancies have resulted in large caseloads and reduced capacity to provide services. In the past year, 37 new VR counselors have been hired. Open VRC 3 and VRC 4 positions are often initially filled by junior level counselors due to lack of qualified candidates. New VRCs require months of training before they can carry a full caseload, which places an increasing burden on experienced VRCs. 64% of VRC 4 staff manage caseloads in excess of 100 customers, which is a high caseload by Washington DSHS/DVR standards.
- The number of staff reported in Section I. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development, includes 20 VRC 4 positions dedicated to Pre-ETS cases or training. These staff are not assigned VR participants. Additionally, cases are assigned based on the customer's location, and some areas of the state already have limited capacity to take additional cases.

*(D) The order (priority categories) to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services ensuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities*

As part of every customer's eligibility determination process, a qualified DSHS/DVR Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) will evaluate: 1) disability-related functional limitations; 2) anticipated number of needed services; and 3) whether services are anticipated to be needed over an extended period to time. The VRC will use these criteria to assign eligible customers to one of five priority categories, based on the severity of the customer's disability. Priority categories ensure that DSHS/DVR services are prioritized for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

**Priority Category 1: Individuals with a most significant disability**

An eligible customer is assigned to Priority Category 1 if:

- The customer experiences serious functional limitations in four or more of the following areas in terms of an employment outcome: mobility, communication, self-care, cognition, and learning (self-direction), interpersonal, work tolerance, and work skills; and
- The customer requires multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

**Priority Category 2: Individuals with a significant disability**

An eligible customer is assigned to Priority Category 2 if:

- The customer experiences serious functional limitations in three of the following areas in terms of an employment outcome: mobility, communication, self-care, cognition, and learning (self-direction), interpersonal, work tolerance, and work skills; and
- The customer requires multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

**Priority Category 3: Individuals with a significant disability**

An eligible customer is assigned to Priority Category 3 if:

- The customer experiences serious functional limitations in two of the following areas in terms of an employment outcome: mobility, communication, self-care, cognition, and learning (self-direction), interpersonal, work tolerance, and work skills; and
- The customer requires multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

**Priority Category 4: Individuals with a significant disability**

An eligible customer is assigned to Priority Category 4 if:

- The customer experiences serious functional limitations in one of the following areas in terms of an employment outcome: mobility, communication, self-care, cognition and learning (self-direction), interpersonal, work tolerance, and work skills; and
- The customer requires multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

### **Priority Category 5: Individuals with Disabilities**

An eligible customer is assigned to Priority Category 5 if:

- The customer is determined eligible for vocational rehabilitation services but does not meet the criteria for Priority Categories 1-4.

Priority categories will be assigned consistently, objectively, and with customer rights to review and due process. Consistent with federal regulations, DSHS/DVR will not consider duration of residency in Washington State, type of disability, age, sex, race, color, national origin, type of expected employment outcome, source of referral, particular service needs or anticipated service costs, individual or family income level, when assigning a priority of service category. In addition, applicable State law and DSHS/DVR policies regarding anti-discrimination apply to eligible customers who are assigned a priority of service category.

*(E) The VR agency's goals for serving individuals in each priority category, including how the agency will assist eligible individuals assigned to closed priority categories with information and referral, the method in which the VR agency will manage waiting lists, and the projected timelessness for opening priority categories. NOTE: Priority categories are considered open when all individuals in the priority category may be served.*

### **Projected Service Goals for PY 2025**

Under the Order of Selection, DSHS/DVR will prioritize resources to serve students with disabilities and customers who are most in need of vocational rehabilitation services, per the following specifications:

- Continue to serve existing customers in all priority categories with approved Individual Plans for Employment (IPE)
- Continue to provide Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to eligible students if those students have begun pre-employment transition services prior to application and eligibility and to all potentially eligible students with disabilities in accordance with order of selection requirements (e.g., TPCAs).
- Serve individuals who are at immediate risk of losing their job in a competitive integrated setting for reasons related to their disability
- Serve individuals in eligibility status and new applicants based on priority of service category

DSHS/DVR plans to close three of five service categories. Priority Category 1 and Priority Category 2 will remain open, ensuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities and about 80% of individuals with a significant disability continue to have access to services. Closed categories include Priority Category 3, Priority Category 4, and Priority Category 5. Individuals in these categories will be placed on a waiting list. The closed categories represent approximately 15% fewer cases receiving services in a plan for employment. DSHS/DVR is taking a measured approach to adjusting its expenditures. By closing three categories at this time, we expect to see a 10% to 15% reduction in case service expenditures over the next 12 months. If expenditures rise above the projected growth, DSHS/DVR will need to consider closing additional categories. If actual expenditures increase at a lower rate, individuals can begin to be released

from the waitlist. The DSHS/DVR budget status is reviewed monthly by the executive leadership team and every two weeks with the DVR Director.

| Priority Category | Projected Cases Served in Plan | Projected Case Service Costs | Projected Wait List Cases |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1                 | 8,800                          | \$16,120,000                 | 0                         |
| 2                 | 3,000                          | \$6,520,000                  | 0                         |
| 3                 | 990                            | \$1,033,000                  | 810                       |
| 4                 | 245                            | \$251,000                    | 355                       |
| 5                 | 390                            | \$409,000                    | 290                       |
| TOTAL             | 13,425                         | \$24,333,235                 | 1,455                     |

**Information and Referral for Individuals in Closed Categories**

DSHS/DVR’s Customer Services Manual describes information and referral (I & R) as a service provided throughout the vocational rehabilitation process and “particularly at Eligibility for customers who have been assigned to a closed priority of service category” when the agency is under an order of selection. Policy also describes the purpose and scope of I & R services and minimum federal requirements.

Those determined to be in a closed category are informed of their eligibility, that DSHS/DVR is not currently serving their Priority of Service Category, and that they have been placed on a waiting list for services. Customers are advised that they can discuss the decision and possible redetermination of the category with their counselor. Information on customer rights and frequently asked questions about Order of Selection is enclosed with the letter.

In addition to resources discussed with customers in their initial meeting with staff, those placed on the waiting list receive a letter listing specific organizations which may help meet vocational rehabilitation needs while they wait for DSHS/DVR services to become available. This includes programs carried out by partners in Washington’s workforce development system, as well as other federal, tribal, and state programs.

Local offices maintain a comprehensive list of organizations, including other workforce development programs, to which customers can be referred. Staff use these resource lists to explore options that meet the customer’s needs. To the extent possible, the list includes specific points of contact within the organization.

A letter is sent every six months to all individuals on the waiting list to notify them of the status of their service category, provide referrals to other resources for training and employment, and remind them to keep their contact information up to date. Individuals on the waiting list may choose to be removed or provide information for redetermination of their category placement.

**Waiting List Management**

On a monthly basis, DSHS/DVR’s Executive Leadership Team will review:

- Projected and actual revenues and expenditures
- Projected and actual number of customers in each priority category
- Number of individuals on the waiting list for services
- Number of potentially eligible students with disabilities receiving Pre-ETS

- Pre-ETS expenditures
- Staff capacity and caseloads

These discussions will inform decisions about changes in the open and closed service categories, including the timing of re-opening categories and releasing customers from the waiting list.

For closed categories, DSHS/DVR will maintain a waiting list of individuals according to their date of application and priority of service category. This list will be used to manage six-month updates to waiting list customers. Customers will be served from the waiting list in order of date of application and category until the category is opened. Categories will be opened when resources are sufficient to serve all customers in the service category including all individuals assigned to the category upon eligibility determination and those individuals on that category's waiting list. Once a closed category is opened, then individuals on the next category's waiting list may begin to be served in order of application date.

**(2) Has the VR Agency elected to serve eligible individuals outside of the order of selection who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment?**

Yes

DSHS/DVR has elected to serve eligible individuals who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment, regardless of an established order of selection. Any other VR services needed on the IPE must be provided in accordance with the order of selection.

## I. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

***In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act, the VR agency must develop and maintain annually a description (consistent with the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act) of the VR agency's comprehensive system of personnel development, which shall include a description of the procedures and activities the VR agency will undertake to ensure it has an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals that provides the following:***

**(1) Analysis of current personnel and projected needs, including**

- (A) The number and type of personnel that are employed by the VR agency in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services, including ratios of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors to clients;*
- (B) The number of personnel currently needed by the VR agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and*
- (C) Projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the VR agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.*

### **Personnel Data (A and B)**

DSHS/DVR employs 338 Staff members to serve a projected 15,764 customers. DSHS/DVR's direct service personnel fall into eight different classifications. The bulk of these positions are Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs), and Rehabilitation Technicians (RTs), the vocational professional and paraprofessional personnel respectively.

### **Personnel Data & Vacancies**

**DSHS/DVR Current and Projected Personnel Needs by Classification, December 2023**

| Classification                               | Personnel Employed | Personnel Currently Needed | Projected Personnel Needed in 5 Years |
|--|--------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| VRC 1 In-training                            | 16                 | 18                         | 23                                    |
| VRC 2 In-Training                            | 11                 | 11                         | 14                                    |
| VRC 3 Journey                                | 79                 | 92                         | 118                                   |
| VRC 4 Lead                                   | 52                 | 62                         | 80                                    |
| RT 1 Case Aide                               | 73                 | 78                         | 100                                   |
| RT 2 Case Aide                               | 0                  | 0                          | 0                                     |
| RT 2 Benefits Tech                           | 8                  | 8                          | 10                                    |
| RT 2 Business Spec                           | 7                  | 13                         | 17                                    |
| VR Supervisor                                | 22                 | 23                         | 23                                    |
| Assistive Technology Assessment Practitioner | 4                  | 5                          | 5                                     |
| Office/Admin. Assistant                      | 8                  | 9                          | 9                                     |
| Program Specialist                           | 3                  | 3                          | 3                                     |
| Administrator/Manager                        | 27                 | 27                         | 27                                    |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                 | <b>310</b>         | <b>349</b>                 | <b>429</b>                            |

*(D) Ratio of qualified VR counselors to clients:*

As of 12/05/23:

- 125 qualified case-carrying VR counselors
- 8,802 customers being served
- Ratio 61 customers per counselor

*(E) Projected number of individuals to be served in 5 years:*

| Projected Individuals to be Served in 2024 | Projected Individuals to be Served 2028 |
|--|---|
| 14,498                                     | 20,000                                  |

**(2) Data and information on personnel preparation and development, recruitment and retention, and staff development, including the following:**

*(A) A list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program; the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.*

**Higher Education Vocational Rehabilitation Programs**

Several pacific northwestern state universities offer vocational rehabilitation graduate programs. As of late 2023, these universities report the following enrollment and graduation rates:



| Institute of Higher Education | Type of Program                                  | No. of Students Enrolled | No. of Prior Year Graduates        |
|-------------------------------|--|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Idaho State University        | MCoun in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling      | 20                       | 5                                  |
| Portland State University     | MS in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling         | 36                       | 10                                 |
| Portland State University     | Graduate Certificate in Orientation and Mobility | 29 (9 from WA)           | 19 (includes 8 full MS + O&M cert) |
| Western Oregon University     | MS in Rehabilitation Counseling                  | 47                       | 12 (plus 4 more in Dec 2023)       |
| Western Washington University | MA in Rehabilitation Counseling                  | 36                       | 14                                 |

(Source: Beth Boland, WWU)

**WWU Master of Arts in Rehabilitation Counseling Participants and Sponsorships, FFY 2020**

|                    |    |
|--------------------|----|
| Students Enrolled  | 32 |
| DSHS/DVR Sponsored | 0  |
| RSA Sponsored      | 6  |
| Graduates          | 10 |
| DSHS/DVR Sponsored | 0  |
| RSA Sponsored      | 5  |

*(B) The VR agency’s plan for recruitment, preparation, and retention of qualified personnel, which addresses the current and projected needs for qualified personnel; and the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the VR agency and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.*

DSHS/DVR’s FTE allotment is capped at 320.0 FTEs until June 30, 2025. The division is able to recruit all field service vacancies as they occur and has exceeded its FTE cap. Approval by the DSHS Secretary is required to fill any newly established exempt or program management positions, as part of ongoing budget savings policies.

**Qualified Personnel Recruitment & Preparation Strategies**

DSHS/DVR will maintain recruitment linkages and concentrated efforts with regional higher education institutions offering rehabilitation counseling programs. These include:

- Western Washington University
- University of Idaho
- Portland State University

- Western Oregon University
- San Diego State University
- Fresno State University
- Utah State University

DSHS/DVR will also continue to send recruitment announcements to higher education institutions offering rehabilitation counseling programs nationwide.

Recruiting qualified candidates in sufficient numbers to fill VRC positions is a continuing challenge. The national shortage of qualified VRC applicants has significantly affected DSHS/DVR's ability to fill vacancies in a timely manner.

In response to recruitment challenges, DSHS/DVR broadened its list of qualifying master's degrees to include psychology, counseling, or a field related to vocational rehabilitation (i.e. fields that promote the physical, psychosocial, or vocational well-being of individuals with disabilities). The list of qualifying master's degrees broadened, but the required competencies that a VRC candidate must demonstrate remained unchanged. The incorporation Bachelor's level education qualifications into the VRC classification series also resulted in a broader recruitment pool and more timely appointments to vacant positions. However, a consequence of hiring graduates without a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling is the additional time required for these new staff to master the work. To ensure all new staff obtain a breadth of VR knowledge, all new field staff attend a robust onboarding curriculum that focuses on all aspects of vocational rehabilitation work.

Additionally, new counselors without a Master's in Rehabilitation complete 18 credit hours in rehabilitation counseling within their first two years with DSHS/DVR. New counselors with a Bachelor's degree have two years to complete a Master's Degree. These Bachelor level counselors also carry fewer cases than journey-level counselors while completing the educational requirements and learning the job.

A particular focus of recruitment continues to be attracting candidates who identify as African American, Latino, and American Indian, as these individuals are presently under-represented among DSHS/DVR personnel and in comparison to our caseload demographics. Targeted recruitment will continue in collaboration with Latino community-based organizations, American Indian VR Programs and other Tribal organizations, as well as African American community-based organizations.

### **Retention & Advancement**

DSHS/DVR encourages staff to enhance their job skills and develop professionally by attending external webinars, conferences, in-person training, and using their free access to LinkedIn Learning. In addition, the DSHS/DVR Training Team facilitates trainings monthly such as Everyday Ethics, a clinical supervision series to support Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisors, as well as online courses that support specialized aspects of VR work.

DSHS/DVR conducts an employee survey bi-annually and uses the results to identify ways to improve employee job satisfaction. In 2024 DSHS/DVR will implement action plans associated with the annual employee engagement survey. We will identify 4 areas for improvement, create action plans to target these areas, and track progress quarterly.

*(C) Description of staff development policies, procedures, and activities that ensure all personnel employed by the VR agency receive appropriate and adequate training and continuing education for professionals and paraprofessionals:*

## **Professional Development**

DSHS/DVR Training offers a customizable, multimodal training, mentorship, and on-demand learning program for staff to accommodate a variety of needs:

1. DSHS/DVR process training
2. Vocational Rehabilitation training
3. Specific Disability, Barrier, and Opportunities knowledge
4. Clinical supervision guidance
5. Customer service, Ethics, and Equity Diversity Access and Inclusion (EDAI) best practices training
6. Professional development

The overall goal of all DSHS/DVR Training is to use a measured, balanced approach to maximize learning retention and psychological safety while staff master the multiple variable complexities of vocational rehabilitation. We intend to give new staff what they need to begin their work, introduce them to their co-workers and partners, inspire them with the social justice foundation of vocational rehabilitation, then provide them continuing education, live support, and on-demand learning opportunities, from internal and external providers, to best serve their current customers.

When an employee is hired at DSHS/DVR, they begin onboarding curricula to match their role per state, DSHS/DVR requirements. For field and (and a growing number of) state roles, new staff work with their supervisor to complete a documented training plan. All required training and refreshers are documented in the DSHS/DVR Training Matrix, then delivered and tracked in Washington state's The Learning Center (TLC), our learning management system. Additional learning opportunities, job aids, and resources are accessible from the Training Team SharePoint site, the Learning Center, and LinkedIn Learning.

DSHS/DVR provides staff development and training for all staff, and in so doing, provides training opportunities (required and optional) to enhance staff competencies and skills. DSHS/DVR offers training to both professional and paraprofessional staff in core subjects through online (eLearning), instructor led virtual, and in-person instructor led training.

DSHS/DVR tracks each staff member progress on assigned training through The Learning Center, the State's learning management system (TLC). Employees use the Learning Center to register for instructor-led and on-demand e-learning modules.

Many internally created and externally contracted DSHS/DVR courses are pre-approved through the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) to provide continuing education hours to those counselors who hold a CRC.

## **Identifying Training Needs**

DSHS/DVR employs various methods of reviewing staff performance, like monthly supervisor case reviews and annual performance evaluations, to cultivate individual performance development plans of all staff. Additional information is collected to identify training needs including:

- Statewide case reviews conducted by the division's Compliance and Planning and Performance teams
- Recommendations from Executive Leaders
- Contributions from all field staff via a statewide training needs assessment.
- Recommendations from the WSRC and the State Independent Living Council
- Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)
- Statewide Training Specialists

Training needs are identified by staff and leadership interaction, then assessed and documented with a Training Needs Analysis template. Needs become training objectives, which become evaluation points. All internally created training goes through subject matter expert, field leadership, Policy, and accessibility review before release. The Training Team employs multiple levels of Kirkpatrick evaluation, including Student Feedback, Initial Competency, and ROI.

### **Statewide Training Team**

The DSHS/DVR Training Team includes six experienced, credentialed vocational rehabilitation counselors who run instructor-led activities and create asynchronous e-learning modules and job aids for staff. Trainers work with field leaders and the Strategies and Policy Unit to make sure internally created training aligns with policy and executive direction.

The Training Coordinator makes sure all staff receive all required assignments in their Learning Center dashboard, which are then monitored by their supervisors. Our Coordinator has also completed a Microsoft Trusted Tester Certification to coach and monitor the production of accessible training materials.

The Training Manager monitors agency wide initiatives and trends to provide training to meet current and future needs, coaches trainers on instructional design and adult learning best practices, provides technical support and coaching for instructional software, manages the Training SharePoint site, monitors professional development educational procurement, and manages training transparency through the entire ADDIE process.

### **Onboarding/New Employee Orientation (NEO)**

All field hires, and other hires as appropriate, attend a three-week onboarding course introducing them to Vocational Rehabilitation as a function of social justice, and how the vocational rehabilitation process is conducted at this agency.

All new hires meet with several key staff to get a warm introduction of the following components and partners of DSHS/DVR:

- DSHS/DVR Director
- Chief of Field Services
- EDAI administrator
- Accessibility Specialist
- Washington State Rehab Council Executive Director
- Washington State Independent Living Council
- Tribal Relations Administrator
- Customer Relations Manager
- Client Assistance Program Personnel
- Benefits Planning Manager
- Forms and Records Manager
- Assistive Technology and Assessment Practitioners (ATAPs)
- Business Relations Manager

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Institute (VRI)**

Washington DSHS/DVR is continuing an interlocal agreement with the Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation (CCER) at University of Washington to deliver specialized classes on the most common disabilities and barriers to employment on a rotating cycle throughout the contract period. These classes

enable staff to build the knowledge needed to perform at a highly professional level. Field staff at DSHS/DVR, as well as DSB and Tribal VR Partners (per MOUs) are invited to attend any and all topics. For the 2024-2026 agreement, VRI will be offering a rotating cycle of courses in half day segments without prerequisite: a morning session featuring disability information provided by a subject matter expert, and an afternoon session discussing the vocational rehabilitation considerations of that disability/barrier. Students can attend either or all sessions to suit their schedule and supplement prior knowledge.

- Depressive and other Mood Disorders
- Anxiety Disorders
- Autism Spectrum
- Intellectual Disability
- Physical Disorders/Conditions
- Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Specific Learning Disabilities
- Schizophrenia and other Psychotic Disorders
- Epilepsy
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Substance Use Disorder (other than alcohol)
- Alcohol Use Disorder
- Personality Disorder Clusters

### **Acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge**

Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals are as follows:

- Washington DSHS/DVR distributes significant information in emails, statewide and regional face-to-face meetings, video teleconferencing, weekly and quarterly newsletters, Agency SharePoint sites, and Microsoft Teams.
- Washington DSHS/DVR staff at all levels attend numerous conferences every year to gain knowledge and skills. Conferences include Workforce Development, Mental Health, Transition, Supported Employment, Program Evaluation, and many others. Individual staff members also are granted approval to attend training or conferences related to serving specific populations or areas of specialization.
- DSHS/DVR Benefit Planners receive specialized training through Cornell University to confirm the delivery of quality services when working with customers that receive monetary or medical benefits. Benefits Planners have provided ongoing training and support statewide with over 17 classes conducted for counseling staff on basics of social security and work incentives for customers.
- Washington Assistive Technology Program: DSHS/DVR has an Interlocal Agreement with the University of Washington, Center for Technology and Disability Studies, Washington Assistive Technology Act Program (WATAP) to provide assistive technology devices and support for customers and staff but no longer contracts with WATAP for staff training.

***(3) Description of the VR agency policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) to ensure that VR agency professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:***

*(A) Standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and*

### **Personnel Standards**

In accordance with 101(a)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act, DSHS/DVR maintains consistent standards for all rehabilitation personnel. These standards include prior education and experience requirements as well as specific core competencies. All current DSHS/DVR counseling personnel (Field Services Administrator, Regional Administrators, VR Supervisors, and VRCs) hold credentials that are consistent with either the state based VRC registration requirements or the national certification standards of the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC).

DSHS/DVR continues to apply educational qualifications for new hires into VRC 2, VRC 3, VRC 4, and VR Supervisor classifications that require the following credentials:

- A master's degree in rehabilitation counseling, psychology, counseling, or a field related to vocational rehabilitation (i.e. fields which promote the physical, psychosocial, or vocational well-being of individuals with disabilities; or
- CRCC Certification; or
- A master's degree in a closely related field, plus 18—quarter (12—semester) credit hours in specified rehabilitation counseling courses at the graduate level.

DSHS/DVR has adopted education qualifications at the Bachelor's level for the VRC1 classification as an entry point in to the VRC classification series. However, the VRC1 has been designated as an "In-training" classification that requires incumbents to obtain a Master's degree within two years of hire.

*(B) The establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.*

DSHS/DVR specifications for the VRC classification series are as follows:

VRC1 – "In-training" classification that requires incumbents to have at least one year of experience and obtain a Master's degree within two years of hire.

VRC2 – "In-training" classification that requires incumbents to have a Master's degree with less than three years of experience.

VRC3 – "Journey" classification that requires incumbents to have a Master's degree with at least three years of experience.

VRC4 – "Lead" classification that requires incumbents to have a Master's degree with at least four years of experience.

DSHS/DVR completes an annual Performance and Development Plan (PDP) with each employee that covers the period September 1 to August 31. The PDP is a standard State of Washington tool used to evaluate job performance and emphasize individualized staff development needs. Specific development needs identified for each employee are to be addressed in the following year. Each "step" in the VRC position has a different training plan, with different skills and abilities to learn and master. The supervisor works with the support of the training team to ensure VRCs obtain the necessary knowledge to be successful.

In addition to determining individual training needs, DSHS/DVR compiles results to plan overall training and developmental priorities conducted staff wide. While specific priorities evolve year-to-year, DSHS/DVR consistently addresses eligibility, vocational assessment, counseling and guidance, vocational planning, job placement, transition services, as well as assistive and rehabilitation technology.

***(4) Method(s) the VR agency uses to ensure that personnel are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.***

**Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs**

DSHS/DVR continues to assure full communication access for all individuals with limited English proficiency. In addition to bilingual DSHS/DVR staff, contracted interpreter and translation services are available. DSHS/DVR forms and publications are available in Cambodian, Chinese, Korean, Laotian, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Somali. Translations are available in other languages when needed. DSHS/DVR has staff who act as the Language Access Advisor and Language Access Coordinator to ensure the division is adhering to the department's Language Access Plan. These staff serve as subject matter experts and support field staff in obtaining effective translation and interpretation services.

Individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing may communicate with DSHS/DVR staff at all locations via video phone, video relay, voice relay, American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, real-time captioning, augmented listening devices, and UbiDuo devices. DSHS/DVR's Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs) provide effective and culturally competent services for customers who are Deaf.

All DSHS/DVR-sponsored trainings include an invitation for potential attendees to request accommodations as part of the registration process. When an accommodation is requested, training staff follow up to assure the accommodation is arranged. Individual staff members may also request accommodations such as Dragon Naturally Speaking or other dictation software through an HR disability accommodation request to ensure they are able to complete their work and participate in training activities.

***(5) As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.***

**Coordination of Personnel Development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**

Washington DSHS/DVR works closely with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to coordinate personnel development activities under an interagency agreement with OSPI and the Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) to address mutual issues. This agreement is intended to facilitate the required coordination with education and provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services, as required under WIOA. In addition, this agreement allows DSHS/DVR, DSB, and OSPI to identify necessary training for DSHS/DVR and education staff regarding new services, new coordination, and best practices in serving students with disabilities.



## J. Coordination with Education Officials

- (1) Describe plans, policies, and procedures for coordination between the designated State agency and education officials responsible for the public education of students with disabilities, that are designed to facilitate the transition of the students with disabilities from the receipt of educational services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services, including Pre-Employment Transition Services.***

### **Introduction**

The 2014 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 profoundly enhance expectations for coordination between DSHS/DVR and education officials to provide early job exploration and work-based learning opportunities for secondary students with disabilities.

DSHS/DVR has developed a long-range plan to develop and strengthen the education-vocational rehabilitation infrastructure for the coming four years.

### **Pre-Employment Transition Services**

With the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) mandate that state vocational rehabilitation programs allocate 15% of federal funds to provide five required Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to all students with disabilities, it is imperative that DSHS/DVR develop meaningful, appropriate, and individualized plans to meet the needs of secondary students with disabilities statewide. These five required activities include 1) job exploration counseling; 2) counseling on post-secondary education opportunities 3) instruction in self-advocacy; 4) workplace readiness training; and 5) work-based learning experiences.

The Code of Federal Regulations (CFRs) has expanded the population of students who receive services from DSHS/DVR. Secondary students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), students with Section 504 Plans, and students with a documented disabilities may be either eligible for DSHS/DVR services or potentially eligible for services. Pre-ETS are provided as generalized services to groups of eligible or potentially eligible students with disabilities, or as individualized and intensive services for students with higher support needs.

For the provisions of Pre-Employment Transition Services, DSHS/DVR has defined a "Student with a Disability" as an individual age 14-21 with a disability in a secondary, postsecondary, or other recognized education program who:

- (A)(1) **Is not younger than the earliest age for the provision of transition services** under section 614(d)(1)(A)(i)(VIII) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(1)(A)(i)(VIII)); and/or Washington Administrative Code 392-172A-03090 (1) (iii) (k) in part "Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education"
- (B)(1) **Is not older than 21 years of age;** or (2) If the State law for the State provides for a higher maximum age for receipt of services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.), is not older than that maximum age; and
- (C)(1) **Is eligible for, and receiving, special education or related services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act** (20 U.S.C. 1411 et seq.); or (2) Is a student who is an individual with a disability, for purposes of section 504. (Authority: Sections 7(37) and 12(c) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; 29 U.S.C. 705(37) and 709(c))

While not all students receiving Pre-ETS will apply for DSHS/DVR services, engagement with transition staff and students works in support of IEP and Washington State High School and Beyond Plan goals.



DSHS/DVR staff meet with student and families to best support their transition needs. DSHS/DVR vocational Counselors, transition, and Pre-ETS staff work together to identify appropriate supports and services for students receiving transition and Pre-ETS services.

DSHS/DVR staff will ensure all student participants who apply for DSHS/DVR services have an IPE (Individualized Plan for Employment) within 90 days of being determined Eligible, unless there is a mutually agreed to extension as described within DSHS/DVR policies and procedures.

## **Coordinated Services for Students and Youth: Goals & Objectives**

### **Strengthen and enhance the DSHS/DVR and education agency partnership at state and local levels so that students receive a seamless continuum of transition services.**

- Continued work with the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to improve communication regarding clarifying roles and responsibilities of each partner agency in coordinating activities that promote successful post-secondary transition services for students with disabilities.
- Follow the guidance given in the DSHS/DVR and Department of Services for the Blind (DSB)'s Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with OSPI to help:
  - Disseminate the agreement to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) including special education directors and 504 coordinators, and to VR staff, and encourage further dissemination to school counselors and principals.
  - Promote outreach to identify potentially eligible students as early as possible, including students who are receiving special education services (who have an IEP), students receiving Section 504 accommodations, aids, and services (who have a 504 Plan), and students who have otherwise documented disabilities and may benefit from Pre-Employment Transition Services and/or transition services.
  - Communicate regularly among state and local entities to identify and address gaps in services.
  - Explore and identify the transition needs of students with disabilities at risk of drop-out or who have a history of incarceration and integrate supports into existing state initiatives as applicable.
  - Promote individualized and student-centered planning, with post-secondary goals consistent with student interests, strengths, preferences, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, and informed choice.
  - Promote transition planning between LEAs and VR to ensure seamless and coordinated services for students.
  - Share training materials developed by the agencies or their agents and extend invitations to trainings using these materials to LEAS and VR staff.
  - Collaborate to identify and implement high quality Pre-Employment Transition and transition services delivery models.
  - Invite partner agencies to statewide meetings as needed for cross training or education.
  - Support eligible students with disabilities to engage with the broadest transition team possible and encourage LEAs to provide early invitations to VR staff for IEP consultation and technical assistance.
- Identify strategies for the provision of transition planning for American Indian and Alaska Native students with disabilities between DVR, the state educational agency, and Section 121 Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation grantees.

## **Increase student access to Pre-Employment Transition Services and individualized transition services from DSHS/DVR.**

As reflected in our CSNA, there is still great need for increased student access to Pre-ETS.

- Continue to ensure every high school in the state, including public, private, alternative and transition programs, and Juvenile Rehabilitation facilities is assigned a VR Counselor liaison or Regional Transition Consultant trained to provide outreach and comprehensive high school transition services.
- Continued inclusive outreach to all educational partners including but not limited to: Transition coordinators, administrators, guidance counselors, school psychologists, 504 coordinators, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, special education teaching staff, alternative high school teachers, the McKinney-Vento coordinator, and Career Technical Education (CTE) staff
- RTCs attend and coordinate the provision of Pre-ETS. This includes attending and leading meetings and presentations at the local and regional level.
- Encourage regular transition or Pre-ETS check-ins with school staff including special education directors, district transition specialists, special education teachers, and teachers whose students are engaged in or receiving Pre-ETS as appropriate
- Collaboration with individual school districts to identify gaps in transition services using data from the state-wide needs assessment as well as school enrollment and demographic data obtained from OSPI
- Continue to develop, support, and expand interagency agreements and service contracts with organizations to provide Pre-ETS to potentially DSHS/DVR-eligible and DSHS/DVR-eligible students.
- Maintain and develop a DSHS/DVR student transition website that provides information and tools to students and their families.
- Update transition best practices guidance and provide ongoing training and technical assistance to DSHS/DVR supervisors, counselors, regional transition consultants, staff, and community partners. This training and technical assistance should incorporate appropriate data and subject matter expert information from other statewide agencies involved in Transition
- Increase outreach to students in traditionally unserved and underserved disability populations not limited to: students with 504 plans, those with emotional-behavioral challenges, students who are deaf or hard of hearing, those who have specific learning disabilities, as well as other disability populations who often do not receive services.
- Increase outreach to students in traditionally unserved and underserved populations that include Tribal youth, Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) youth justice-involved youth, unhoused youth, LGBTQAI+, multilingual students in a culturally responsive way, and students and youth receiving foster care.

### ***(2) Describe the current status and scope of the formal interagency agreement between the VR agency and the State educational agency. Consistent with the requirements of the formal interagency agreement pursuant to 34 CFR 361.22(b), provide, at a minimum, the following information about the agreement:***

- (A) Consultation and technical assistance, which may be provided using alternative means for meeting participation (such as video conferences and conference calls), to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school*

*to post-school activities, including pre-employment transition services and other vocational rehabilitation services;*

### **Consultation with Education**

DSHS/DVR staff including the Workforce and Youth Chief, DSHS/DVR Transition manager, Pre-ETS Program manager, Regional Transition Consultants, and transition program supports collaborate with education and transition partners at local and state levels.

As part of the formal interagency agreement developed in 2020 between DSHS/DVR, Department of Services for the Blind (DSB), and OSPI, DSHS/DVR consults with and provides technical assistance to staff at secondary schools and LEAs in transition planning for students with disabilities from school to post-school activities. This agreement defines partners' roles in Pre-Employment Transition Services and collaborative training activities and is based on the strengths of agencies that support transition students.

This consultation effort includes attending Transition Collaborative meetings. These meetings are a collaboration between OSPI, CCTS, DSB, Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), county Developmental Disabilities representatives, and DSHS/DVR. The Transition Collaborative meetings support meaningful cross collaboration of transition and Pre-ETS services, opportunities for outreach and technical assistance, and transition systems' alignment for increased transition access across the state.

*(B) Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs (IEPs) under section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;*

### **DSHS/DVR and Individualized Education Plans (IEP)**

DSHS/DVR has designated Vocational Counselor liaisons that work closely with local education agencies statewide; every high school in Washington has a designated DSHS/DVR Counselor liaison, including tribally operated secondary schools. DSHS/DVR liaisons maintain close collaborative relationships with students, families, educators, and partners. Their activities include, but are not limited to:

- Build and maintain relationships with educational partners
- Explain the scope of VR services
- Coordinates outreach and training activities for students and families
- Addresses organizational problems between school and DSHS/DVR
- Maintains regular contact with schools
- Provide individualized transition services (when appropriate)
- Participate in IEP planning and development
- Attends IEP meetings
- Ongoing consultation in the development of transition IEPs
- Dissemination of appropriate transition materials to parents, students, school staff, and partners
- Attend transition fairs and events as needed

*(C) Roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition service;*

### **Financial Resources and Personnel**

#### **Financial Responsibilities**

DSHS/DVR provides any financial resources and services needed to establish eligibility for students and youth with disabilities. In addition, funds are made available for students' activities primarily related to Pre-Employment Transition Services, transition services, and employment services.

Local Educational Associations are fiscally responsible for providing transition services for students eligible for special education that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student to facilitate their movement from school to post-school activities.

Decisions regarding funding that may not fall into these agreed categories is made collaboratively. In these instances, the following is considered: a.) Student eligibility for services; b.) The purpose of the transition service (is the purpose primarily education or employment); and c.) Customary transition services provided by each entity.

### **Personnel**

DSHS/DVR, OSPI, and local education agencies maintain lists of DSHS/DVR Regional Transition Consultants on public-facing web sites.

Regional Transition Consultants work in partnership with students, families, school districts, educators, and contracted vendors to plan, implement and provide ongoing support to facilitate individualized group Pre-ETS services. The RTCs engage in consistent outreach efforts to schools, community partners and regional transition networks to support these efforts, provide consultation to partners, and technical assistance when necessary.

DSHS/DVR Vocational Counselors and Regional Transition Consultants work in partnership together to provide transition services at the local level including outreach, consultation, and direct services.

*(D) Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services;*

### **Outreach and Identification Activities**

The current agreement between DSHS/DVR, DSB, and OSPI identifies outreach activities to increase the number of students with disabilities who engage in DSHS/DVR and DSB services. In addition, this agreement specifies that DSHS/DVR services should be available to all students with transition IEPs well before students prepare to exit secondary education.

Outreach and engagement activities include:

- An OSPI representative is a member of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council
- DSHS/DVR Counselors are assigned as liaisons to each high school in the state
- DSHS/DVR and OSPI share training and information materials for cross-program professional development
- DSHS/DVR provides outreach and education about DSHS/DVR services to underserved populations, including students with disabilities

Additionally, transition staff present information at monthly Education Service District (ESD) Special Education Transition Network meetings to disseminate information to Special Ed Directors and administrators. This can include but is not limited to work opportunities that compliment graduation requirements, support services, and local transition events. Special Education directors and administrators then disseminate this information to their local Special Education departments. This partnership allows Pre-Employment Transition work to compliment the work students must complete their graduation pathway and prepare for successful transition into employment.

DSHS/DVR in partnership with Washington State University College of Education implemented the Transition Self-Assessment Tool (TSAT) to evaluate transition services in Washington state. Local Educational Associations complete the tool and the data is collected and analyzed. This report provides guidance to identify schools with high support needs, general service needs across the state, and students with disabilities in Washington state with unmet needs. This information is provided to RTCs and allows RTCs to target their outreach and engagement appropriately. This effort is ongoing and is intended to support our identification of students, families, and schools that would benefit from DVR services.

*(E) Coordination necessary to satisfy documentation requirements set forth in 34 CFR part 397 regarding students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment; and*

The 2021 Washington State Legislature ended the practice of allowing workers with a disability to earn less than the minimum wage under a subminimum wage certificate. RCWs 49.12.110, 49.46.060, and 3 49.46.170 were amended and a new section to chapter 71A.10 RCW was added to Washington law, which eliminated new certificates for any employer in Washington State after July 31, 2023 and phases out existing certificates.

*(F) Assurance that, in accordance with 34 CFR 397.31, neither the SEA nor the local educational agency will enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity, as defined in 34 CFR 397.5(d), for the purpose of operating a program under which youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage*

DSHS/DVR's contractors or local education agencies do not fund contracts under which a student or youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

## K. Coordination with Employers

***In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(11)(E) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe how the VR agency will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of VR services; and transition services for youth and students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.***

### Introduction

This section describes DSHS/DVR's contributions to coordinated business engagement activities. DSHS/DVR and its workforce development partners will embrace a dual—customer model, serving both Washington's businesses and Washingtonians living with disabilities.

Businesses will have enhanced access to talented and highly skilled job seekers with disabilities, while enjoying DSHS/DVR's training and technical assistance supports. Concurrently, DSHS/DVR and its partners will provide Washingtonians living with disabilities with the full breadth of best practice rehabilitation, training, and employment services needed to thrive in Washington's workplaces and communities.

This dual-customer model closes skill gaps for businesses, promotes the economic self-sufficiency of Washingtonians living with disabilities, and contributes to a more prosperous Washington.

## **Businesses & Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

In coordination with workforce development partners at the state and local level, DSHS/DVR establishes the following business engagement objectives for PY 2024 - 2027:

- Define the areas/counties/cities with continued need of Business Relations Specialists (BRS) and Job Coaches/Employment Specialist services.
- Continue to update the 5-year Strategic Plan for Business Engagement. Include year-by-year details and implementation recommendations.
- Utilize the newly created business engagement tracking tool to track coordination with businesses and evaluate areas of need.
- Continue to partner and participate in WorkSource business engagement strategies and provide opportunities with career pathways programs throughout the state. This includes partner events, webinars, and social media messaging.
- Ensure all newly onboarded BRS complete the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act 101 and Washington's One-Stop System Training.
- Utilize DSHS/DVR Business Relation Specialists to assist with the recruitment and referral of qualified job seekers with disabilities to meet businesses' demands.
- Provide businesses with training and technical expertise services such as Americans with Disabilities Act reasonable accommodations and disability etiquette to employers, DSHS/DVR staff, and WorkSource center staff
- Coordinate local WDC/WorkSource in the engagement of federal contractors and subcontractors, linking these contractors to skilled job seekers with disabilities to help the business meet their 7% utilization goal for people with disabilities, per Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act. Maintain partnership with the OFCCP.
- Collaborate with tribally-owned business enterprises and American Indian/Alaska Native-owned businesses to expand job search, job placement, and other services to all customers when they are job ready.
- Change employer perceptions of people with disabilities through and integrated marketing campaign. This includes a digital and social campaign to gain traction with businesses, as well as BRSs connecting with local businesses, chambers of commerce, and professional organizations.
- Support and expand innovative disability hiring initiatives with businesses to promote the hiring of individuals with disabilities in high-skill and high-demand occupations.

## **Businesses & Transition Services**

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) provide value to both students and businesses. In the dual-customer model, Pre-ETS will engage Washington's businesses in actively molding the future workforce. By exposing students with disabilities to hands-on and realistic work experiences, these students will enter the workforce well prepared to meet business' skill needs and expectations. As a result, business will experience higher productivity, better engagement, and reduced turnover.

DSHS/DVR will collaborate with workforce development, education, and community partners to:

- Continue to build relationships with businesses who will work with students and youth by developing internships and on-the-job training programs.
- Partner with DSHS/DVR Transition Consultants and workforce development council to provide opportunities for youth career exploration, including workplace tours, job shadows, internships/apprenticeships, and OJTs at businesses across Washington.

- Develop business training and outreach materials that address hiring youth and students with disabilities.
- Promote the development and expansion of on-site job exploration and internship programs, such as Project Search, statewide.
- Partner with businesses, leveraging pre-employment experiences to prepare youth for the realities and expectations of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplace.

## L. Interagency Cooperation with Other Agencies

***In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(11)(C) and (K), describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system to develop opportunities for community-based employment in integrated settings, to the greatest extent practicable for the following:***

### ***(1) State Programs Carried out under Section 4 of Assistive Technology Act of 1998***

DSHS/DVR has an Interlocal Agreement with the University of Washington, Center for Technology and Disability Studies, Washington Assistive Technology Act Program (WATAP), which is the state program carrying out activities under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. WATAP provides

AT device demonstrations and evaluations, purchases some equipment requested specifically by DSHS/DVR, provides our ATAPs with a technology “go kit” for working with Customers, and lends AT devices to staff and customers. DSHS/DVR maintains a close collaborative relationship with WATAP, which includes DSHS/DVR representation on WATAP’s Advisory Council.

DSHS/DVR customers will continue to have access to assistive technology devices, services, and consultations. DSHS/DVR counselors will assess whether assistive technology (AT) services or devices are needed to address all customers’ barriers to employment as part of DSHS/DVR’s standardized vocational assessment process. DSHS/DVR has four full-time Assistive Technology Assessment Practitioners (ATAPs) to provide customers with specialized AT assessments, consult with staff and customers regarding a full spectrum of AT services and products, coordinate service delivery with AT vendors, and disseminate information and resources about advancements in AT devices.

To ensure that DSHS/DVR staff is informed of ongoing developments in the AT field, assistive and rehabilitative technology will continue to be a core focus of the redesigned DSHS/DVR VR Institute curriculum.

DSHS/DVR will monitor AT service delivery in compliance with WIOA requirements. In addition, DSHS/DVR will renew its commitment to being an organizational role model in effective utilization of AT as accommodations for individuals with disabilities including, but not limited to, individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing and individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

### ***(2) Programs Carried out by Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture***

DSHS/DVR does not currently coordinate with programs carried out by this agency but will investigate available programs.



### **(3) *Non-Educational Agencies Serving Out-of-School Youth***

#### **Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families, Juvenile Rehabilitation (DCYF/JR):**

DCYF/JR provides rehabilitative services to justice-involved youth. DSHS/DVR and DCYF/JR have a cooperative agreement to jointly serve JR youth who are eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services and other DSHS/DVR services. Through coordinated services, DCYF/JR youth with disabilities will receive services supporting community re-entry along career pathways.

### **(4) *State Use Contracting Programs***

Not Applicable

### **(5) *State Agency Responsible for Administering State Medicaid Plan***

**Health Care Authority (HCA):** The Health Care Authority (HCA) administers Medicaid services to all eligible DSHS/DVR customer recipients. HCA is also the designated state mental health authority. DSHS/DVR and HCA closely coordinate to assure that individuals receive medical and behavioral health services necessary to achieve their employment goals. In addition, DSHS/DVR has a cooperative agreement with DDA that describes how Title 19 services under the State Medicaid Plan, including community-based waiver programs, will be utilized to develop and support integrated, community-based employment opportunities for customers.

HCA contracts with Amerigroup, a Third-Party Administrator, to administer Foundational Community Supports (FCS), a Medicaid Transformation Demonstration project that provides supported employment services for individuals with behavioral health conditions or long-term care needs. HCA Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (HCA/DBHR) and the Department of Social and Health Services Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (DSHS/AL TSA) support FCS network development and provider engagement.

### **(6) *State Agency Responsible for Providing Services for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities***

**DSHS Developmental Disabilities Administration (DSHS/DDA):** DSHS/DDA is the primary agency that funds extended services for individuals with developmental disabilities who require supported employment. DSHS/DDA contracts for these services with Washington counties, and counties sub-contract with community rehabilitation providers to provide extended services to DSHS/DVR customers. DSHS/DVR coordinates with DSHS/DDA in the following ways:

- DSHS/DVR and DSHS/DDA leadership meets on a regular basis and is co-sponsoring several initiatives aimed at improving employment outcomes for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities and advancing the skills of employment service providers that serve joint DSHS/DVR and DSHS/DDA customers.
- DSHS/DVR is represented as a member of the Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council.

DSHS/DVR collaborates with DSHS/DDA, counties, Community Rehabilitation Programs, schools, and students/families to implement the School-to Work program, which provides state-only funded services for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD). The legislative intent behind School-to-Work funding is to make specific services available to all 39 counties in Washington, with funding distributed through counties. DSHS/DVR receives data on eligible students from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, contracts with counties, and collaborates with stakeholders to offer



team building, assessment, job placement, employment, and stabilization services for specified individuals with IDD.

### ***(7) State Agency Responsible for Providing Mental Health Services***

**Health Care Authority Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (HCA/DBHR):** The Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR) was moved from DSHS to HCA in 2018 to integrate physical health with behavioral health, thereby providing whole-person care. DBHR manages the majority of public behavioral health services in Washington. HCA/DBHR provides a broad range of community-based mental health, substance use disorder, and pathological and problem gambling services using multiple funding sources to meet broad behavioral health needs. In addition, HCA/DBHR sponsors recovery supports and the development of system of care networks.

DSHS/DVR entered into an Interlocal Agreement with HCA/DBHR in 2019. The purpose of the agreement is to establish a collaborative framework for both agencies to provide employment services for individuals with behavioral health conditions. This framework identifies shared eligibility criteria and defines roles and responsibilities for DSHS/DVR's supported employment program and HCA/DBHR's Foundational Community Supports (FCS) supported employment program.

DSHS/DVR and HCA/DBHR coordinate in the following ways:

- DSHS/DVR and HCA/DBHR leadership meet on a regular basis for ongoing coordination and collaboration between systems. DSHS/DVR and HCA/DBHR FCS Workgroup meet on a regular basis for ongoing coordination, collaboration for mutual customers enrolled in FCS and DSHS/DVR.
- DSHS/DVR and HCA/DBHR participate in the FCS Amerigroup Advisory Committee with DSHS/ALTSA and other FCS providers and stakeholders.
- DSHS/DVR is represented as a member of the Washington State Behavioral Health Advisory Council.
- DSHS/DVR collaborates with HCA/DBHR's FCS to serve shared supported employment customers, using the FCS Individual Placement Support (IPS) model of supported employment and DSHS/DVR supported employment services.
- DSHS/DVR maintains active referral relationships with treatment providers that are funded through HCA/DBHR contracts with each county.
- DSHS/DVR assigned liaison counselors to work with behavioral health agencies across the state, facilitating access to DSHS/DVR services for behavioral health consumers.
- DSHS/DVR and DBHR signed a memorandum of collaboration that establishes methods for Medicaid outpatient behavioral health services to be provided as extended services for joint DSHS/DVR supported employment customers.
- King County Behavioral Health and Recovery has become a Ticket-to-Work (TTW) Employment Network and is establishing a Partnership Plus Agreement with DSHS/DVR to build a revenue stream from the TTW Program that will fund extended services for those mental health customers who require a supported employment model.

### ***(8) Other Federal, State, and Local Agencies and Programs Outside of the Workforce Development System***

**DSHS Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (DSHS/ALTSA):** DSHS/ALTSA provides long-term care through personal care attendant services, Kinship Care, Roads to Community Living, "money

follows the person” policies, New Freedom Services, the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Council, the Title V Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP), and the Medicaid Transformation Demonstration project Foundational Community Supports (FCS) Supported Employment program. DSHS/ALTSA supports FCS network development and provider engagement. DSHS/DVR and DSHS/ALTSA will explore the development of a cooperative agreement for serving joint customers.

**DSHS Community Services Division (DSHS/CSD):** DSHS/CSD administers the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Program, Aged, Blind, Disabled (ABD) Program (formerly known as the General Assistance - Unemployable (GAU) Program), Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) Program, and Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) Program. These programs provide time-limited income assistance and other support services to low-income families and individuals. Washington DSHS/DVR continues to work closely with CSD to mutually serve Customers through an Interlocal Agreement that implements a warm handoff process between the local Community Service Office (CSO) and DSHS/DVR. CSD participants with disabilities are offered a warm handoff to DSHS/DVR if they are interested in pursuing employment, with the goal of increasing positive outcomes for these participants.

**Governor’s Committee on Disability Issues and Employment (GCDE):** The DSHS/DVR Director participates as a member of the GCDE and partners with committee members on initiatives.

**Tribal Governments and Programs:** DSHS/DVR and the Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) have a joint statewide cooperative agreement with thirteen Section 121 Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation (TVR) programs operated by tribal governments, consortium of tribal governments, or a tribal organization that performs American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services benefiting more than one Indian tribe, including twelve in Washington and one in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. This joint agreement outlines how all partners will ensure effective communication, collaboration, coordination, and cooperation in serving individuals with disabilities who are tribal members in Washington. The agreement, updated on an annual basis, outlines procedures for referrals, joint cases, financial responsibility, shared training opportunities, information sharing, transition planning, and communication. TVR directors meet annually with DSHS/DVR and DSB directors in a government-to-government collaboration to promote partnership, maximize resources, and ensure high service quality for American Indian and Alaska Native individuals with disabilities who want to work. Through DSHS, DSHS/DVR continues its cooperative working relationships and service delivery commitments with all federally recognized tribes in Washington, including those that do not operate federally funded Tribal VR programs. DSHS/DVR participates as a member on the DSHS Indian Policy Advisory Committee. This includes annual and quarterly meetings to review our partnership and to identify service delivery improvements for individuals with disabilities, who are members of federally recognized tribes, as well as those who identify as American Indian or Alaska Native.

**United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA):** DSHS/DVR has a cooperative agreement with the regional USDVA Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) and its regional offices to facilitate improved service delivery for customers receiving USDVA benefits by formalizing referral procedures, designating local referral liaisons, and coordinating services that contribute to the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

**University of Washington Rehabilitation Program:** Since 2006, DSHS/DVR and the University of Washington Rehabilitation Medicine Unit have collaborated to maintain an on-site Rehabilitation Medicine-DSHS/DVR liaison. This mutually beneficial relationship improves inpatient and outpatient care at the University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC) by providing UWMC patients with direct access to DSHS/DVR services during their hospital treatment. The UWMC is the only regional rehabilitation medicine

center in the Pacific Northwest for the treatment of spinal cord injuries and other severe disabling medical conditions. Early introduction in the medical setting provides DSHS/DVR with comprehensive insight into patient needs and makes the referral process more efficient. This relationship provides UWMC patients with additional resources for education, support, and funding. The liaison coordinates DSHS/DVR orientation and intake procedures for individuals referred from UW Rehab Medicine; determines eligibility for DSHS/DVR services; provides information and referral; participates in UWMC team staffing to coordinate DSHS/DVR services with the interdisciplinary treatment team; upon release from the hospital, assists with transitioning the individual to a VR Counselor near their home; learns about extensive medical and other resources available through the UW Medical School; and shares resources with other DSHS/DVR counselors.

**Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges:** The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) oversees the operation of thirty-nine Community and Technical Colleges across the state. DSHS/DVR will develop cooperative agreements with SBCTC programs authorized, and not authorized, by WIOA to jointly serve students with disabilities who require VR services to achieve competitive employment outcomes. DSHS/DVR works closely with SBCTC to implement an Interlocal Agreement between the Public Institutions of Higher Education (PIHE), DSHS/DVR and DSB to support the costs of specific academic accommodations for students who are attending school as part of their approved IPE.

**Washington State Department of Social & Health Services (DSHS):** DSHS administers a wide range of programs that include, but are not limited to, developmental disabilities, long-term care and disability determination, and economic assistance services. DSHS/DVR continues close collaboration throughout DSHS.

**Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA):** DSHS/DVR and WDVA have procedures for referring DSHS/DVR customers with military service to WDVA to determine eligibility for any state or federal Veterans' benefits. This collaboration has increased the use of Veterans' benefits as comparable services for DSHS/DVR customers who are veterans with disabilities.

**Washington State Health Care Authority:** The Health Care Authority (HCA) administers Medicaid services to all eligible DSHS/DVR customer recipients. HCA is also the designated state mental health authority. DSHS/DVR and HCA closely coordinate to assure that individuals receive medical and behavioral health services necessary to achieve their employment goals. In addition, DSHS/DVR has a cooperative agreement with DSHS/DDA that describes how Title 19 services under the State Medicaid Plan, including community-based waiver programs, will be utilized to develop and support integrated, community-based employment opportunities for customers.

HCA contracts with Amerigroup, a Third-Party Administrator, to administer Foundational Community Supports (FCS), a Medicaid Transformation Demonstration project that provides supported employment services for individuals with behavioral health conditions or long-term care needs. HCA Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR) and the DSHS/Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (AL TSA) support FCS network development and provider engagement.

HCA also administers Health Care for Workers with Disabilities (HWD), a Medicaid buy-in program. DSHS/DVR coordinates with HCA/HWD to assist qualified individuals to receive medical benefits after they become employed.

**Washington State Office of Financial Management/State Human Resources (OFM/SHR):** The Office of Financial Management (OFM) division of State Human Resources (SHR) administers the Supported Employment in State Government (SESG) Program, adopted by the Washington State Legislature in 1999. Executive Order 13-02, effective May 22, 2013, requires each agency, board, commission, and other organization that reports to the Governor to participate in the SESG program. Positions are available to individuals with a developmental disability or a significant disability who require on the job training and long-term support to perform their job successfully. Candidates must also have a reliable source of long-term support.

DSHS/DVR has a SESG Program Memorandum of Understanding with OFM/SHR to designate a Statewide SESG Program Coordinator, market the SESG Program to state agencies, assist agencies to establish and fill positions, and ensure that employee needs for job modification, reasonable accommodations and long-term support are met.

Individuals with a developmental disability or a significant disability who require on the job training and long-term support and have a reliable source of long-term support are eligible for these positions. All SESG positions are regular classified positions, filled on a competitive basis per State recruitment and hiring policies and procedures.

#### ***(9) Other Private Nonprofit Organizations***

**Association of County Human Services - Developmental Disabilities:** The Association of County Human Services - Developmental Disabilities (ACHS-DD) is a nonprofit, non-partisan membership organization of the thirty-nine County Developmental Disabilities (CDD) Coordinators across the state who contract with DSHS/DDA to deliver residential, employment and other services to individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities.

**Centers for Independent Living:** DSHS/DVR currently contracts Title VII, Part B funds to four independent living centers statewide. These centers use Part B funds to enhance and expand core independent living services with a focus on youth with significant disabilities. In addition to core services, independent living centers have been focusing on outreach to increase services in unserved or underserved geographic areas. Additional outreach efforts include targeted disability groups, minority groups, and urban or rural populations with the focus on youth with significant disabilities and 504 plans. The goal is to create a safe environment for youth with disabilities in which youth feel comfortable and confident when talking to allies. This goal will be accomplished by enhancing youth understanding of independent living philosophy, successful self-advocacy, and ways to engage with legislators about disability issues. The independent living centers' Title VII, Part B contracts are aligned with and can be amended to meet the goals set forth by the State Plan for Independent Living, the strategic plan developed by the Washington State Independent Living Council.

**Community Employment Alliance:** The Community Employment Alliance (CEA) is statewide membership organization comprised of Community Rehabilitation Programs. CEA provides advocacy, education, and partnering opportunities to promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities. DSHS/DVR and CEA leadership meet quarterly to share information, hear concerns and collaborate on issues and special projects affecting employment services.

**Disability Inclusion Network (DIN):** The DIN is a business resource group for members of the Disabled Community and their allies in Washington State service. The DIN's mission is to engage in the experience, values, and knowledge of people with disabilities in state government, promote universal access, and

create an environment where people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of the workplace. THE DIN's vision is to see Washington State as an Employer of Choice ensuring people with disabilities have equitable access and resources through recruitment, hiring, training, development, retention, and promotion.

**Traumatic Brain Injury Strategic Partnership Advisory Council:** In the late 1990s, DSHS/DVR was the primary sponsor of a demonstration grant to identify gaps in providing services to individuals who sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI). DSHS/DVR continues to be a represented member of the TBI Strategic Partnership Advisory Council. This group discusses TBI-related policy issues, system development, and the need for services to meet the needs of TBI survivors, family members, prospective employers, and community members. The TBI Strategic Partnership Advisory Council has identified gaps in housing, a lack of resources, and a need for support group facilitator training. This Council has successfully encouraged the Washington State Legislature to pass legislation that adds fees to specific traffic violations (e.g., negligent driving and speeding) which correlate with increased risk of injury accidents and TBIs. These collected fees are used to help fund TBI-related programs and resources. DSHS/DVR continues to be an active partner in addressing the needs of individuals who have been, or will be affected by, traumatic brain injuries.

**Washington Workforce Association:** The Washington Workforce Association (WWA) is a nonprofit, non-partisan membership organization comprised of Washington's twelve Workforce Development Councils (WDCs). The WWA partners with state, regional, and national organizations advocating for a coordinated and fully funded workforce development system focused on the needs of job seekers and businesses. To coordinate and align workforce development services at the local level, DSHS/DVR and the WWA have created and signed a *Shared Vision, Values, & Principles of Collaboration* document which outlines how DSHS/DVR and WDCs will provide integrated services to individuals with disabilities in Washington's One-Stop Centers.