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VR Outcome Trends and the Recent Decline in Employment for VR Customers with Intellectual Disabilities

By Frank A. Smith, John Butterworth, Daria Domin, and Allison Cohen Hall

Most people with intellectual disabilities (ID) aspire to gainful employment. To assist them with this goal, state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies offer employment services based upon Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs). A commonly used measure of outcomes is the rehabilitation rate, defined as the percentage of individuals who achieve employment out of all individuals whose cases were closed after receiving services. This indicator, however, neglects to consider that not all eligible individuals progress to receive services. This occurs for a variety of individual, service, and systems reasons. Considering this group provides a more complete picture of the experiences of individuals who engage the VR system and exit without an employment outcome. This Data Note explores trends in VR closure status for individuals with ID. This group includes all individuals for whom the cause of primary and/or secondary impairment as indicated on their RSA 911 case closure record is code 25 for intellectual disability.

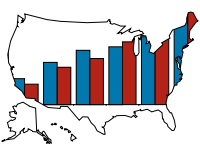
Figure 1 displays VR closure trends for individuals with ID from FY 2002 through FY 2010. During this period, employment outcomes as a percentage of all VR closures for individuals with ID decreased (from 42.5% of closures in 2002 to 31.7% of closures in 2010). Much of the decline occurred between 2008 and 2010. This is to be expected, as this time period coincides with the general economic recession and declining employment rates for the entire working population.

The economic recession is not solely responsible for this decline in employment outcomes. If it were, we might expect an increase in closures without an employment outcome after receiving services that is equal, or nearly equal, to the decrease in closures into employment. As anticipated, the percentage of closures without an employment outcome after receiving services did increase. However, there was a greater increase in the percentage of closures that exited after being determined eligible but before an IPE was signed. This increased from 20% of all closures with ID in 2002 to 27% of all closures with ID in 2010.

The increase in eligible individuals who did not get to the point where an IPE was developed and signed is not unique to VR closures with ID. In fact, the increase since 2002 has brought individuals with ID to levels similar to those without ID (27% for individuals with ID, compared with 27.7% for individuals without ID in 2010) (see Figure 2). This growth in closures prior to completion of an IPE raises questions about why individuals leave VR services before their IPE is completed and whether strategies that support more individuals to complete an IPE will lead to an increase in employment outcomes.

StateData.info

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Recent years have seen a decline in the percentage of VR closures that exit with an employment outcome. While this percentage decreased for consumers with and without ID, the relative decrease for those with ID was greater than it was for those without ID. While there are many factors that contribute to this trend, including a challenging job market, VR agencies should focus their efforts into strategies within their control that can halt or even reverse this trend. This may include exploring ways to ensure more eligible consumers develop and implement an IPE.

Figure 1. VR Closure Trends for VR Customers With ID¹

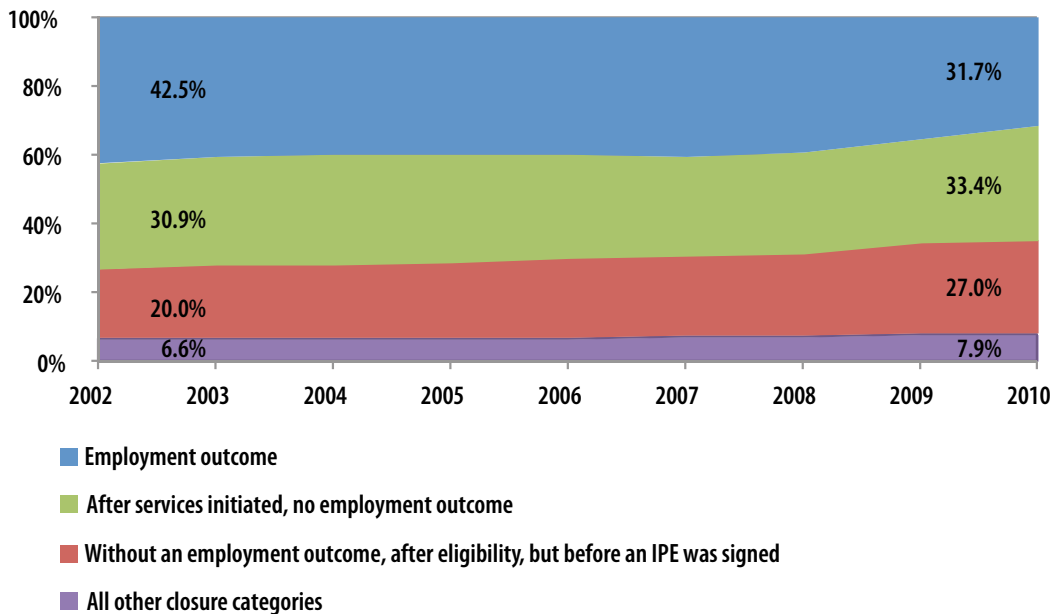
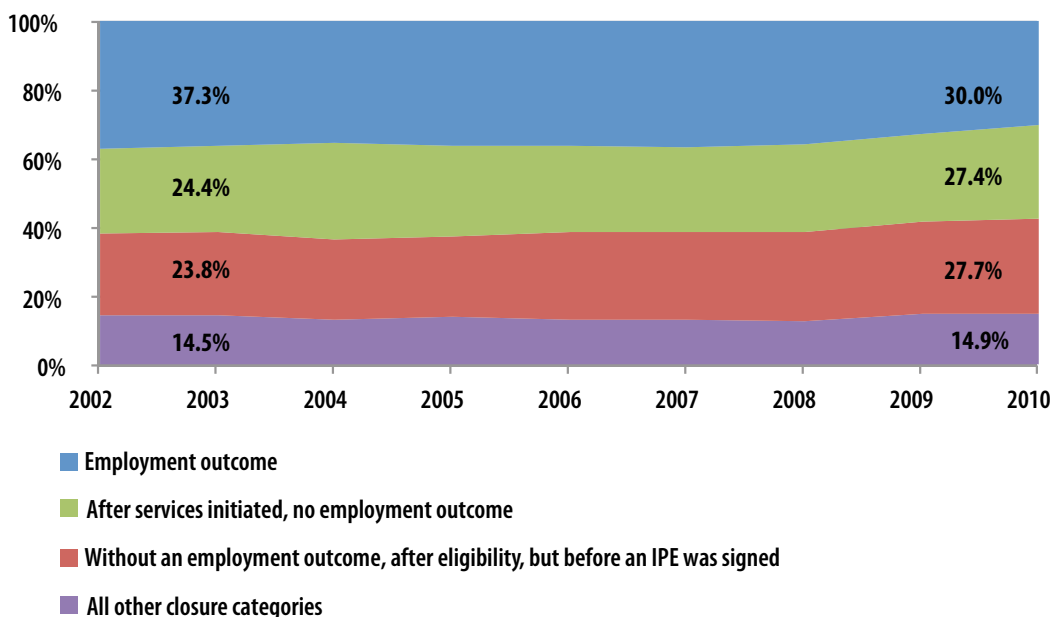


Figure 2. VR Closure Trends for VR Customers Without ID



¹ All other closure categories represent only 7.9% of closures in 2010 and include "Exited as an applicant," "Exited during or after a trial work experience/extended evaluation," "Exited without an employment outcome, after a signed IPE, but before receiving services," and "Exited from an order of selection waiting list."