

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES AND OUTCOMES OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES: 2014-2023

By *Iberto Migliore, Jean Winsor, John Shepard, and John Butterworth*

This DataNote describes the characteristics of, services received by, and employment outcomes of adults with an intellectual disability (ID) who exited from the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program during fiscal years (FY) 2014 through 2023, in the 50 US states and the District of Columbia (DC).

For context, we compare the findings of adults with ID to the findings of people with other disabilities. All data are from the Rehabilitation Services Administration 911 (RS-911) database unless otherwise specified. See the Method section at the end of this brief for more details about the data and variable definitions.

When comparing outcomes from 2023 with outcomes from 2022, the key takeaways include:

- The number of people who exited the VR program decreased by 1%
- The percentage of people who received services decreased by 1%
- The rehabilitation rate decreased by 1%
- Wages slightly decreased after adjusting for inflation
- Weekly work hours decreased by 1 hour
- Time from application to exit with employment increased by 14 days
- The majority of people who exited VR are male, white, and transition-age
- Outcomes varied considerably across states

The Number of People with ID who Exited the VR Program Decreased by 1%

In 2023, 36,319 people with ID exited the VR program (Table 1). This figure decreased slightly compared to 2022 (-1%) and remains lower than in the pre-pandemic years, when it was over 45,000 with a peak of 47,595 in 2016. Similarly, the total closures for people with other disabilities was 292,303 in 2023, 1% less than in 2022. This continues a declining trend from the pre-pandemic period.

Table 1. National Trends in Employment Outcomes¹

	Total closures		Received services		Rehabilitation rate		Hourly wage		Weekly hours		Got a job in <one year	
	ID	Other	ID	Other	ID	Other	ID	Other	ID	Other	ID	Other
2014	45,443	495,293	67%	58%	56%	54%	\$10.79	\$15.02	23	31	30%	33%
2015	47,390	470,289	68%	62%	56%	57%			23	30	32%	35%
2016	47,595	459,141	70%	63%	55%	57%			23	30	33%	37%
2017	38,642	361,601	72%	67%	47%	49%			23	30	33%	38%
2018	44,152	387,410	78%	72%	47%	48%	\$11.81	\$16.47	23	31	31%	37%
2019	45,108	374,479	77%	71%	46%	46%	\$12.01	\$16.49	22	30	27%	35%
2020	41,644	347,275	80%	74%	44%	44%	\$13.07	\$18.08	22	31	26%	36%
2021	33,663	280,765	83%	78%	40%	42%	\$12.38	\$17.29	24	31	20%	31%
2022	36,789	294,351	84%	79%	44%	45%	\$12.46	\$17.23	23	31	25%	35%
2023	36,319	292,303	83%	77%	43%	44%	\$12.96	\$18.07	22	31	26%	39%

¹The years 2014-2016 refer to the period from October 1 to September 30. The year 2017 refers to the period from October 1 to June 30 (nine months only). The years 2018-2023 refer to the period from July 1 to June 30. Each year refers to the end date of the reported period. For example the year 2023 refers to the period July 1 2022 to June 30 2023.

Note: ID = intellectual disabilities; Other = other disabilities. Hourly wages are in 2023 dollars.

*Includes only 9 months due to a change in the RSA-911 reporting protocol.

The Percentage of People with ID who Received Services Decreased by 1%

Receiving VR services is an important first step toward employment. In 2023, 83% of people with ID who exited the VR program received services. This figure is slightly smaller than in 2022 (84%), but consistent with a long-term growth trend since the low of 67% reported in 2014. The corresponding figure for people with other disabilities was 77% in 2023, slightly smaller compared to 2022, but still confirming a long-term growth trend from a low of 58% in 2014 (Table 1).

A variety of reasons may cause job seekers to exit the VR program without employment. The most frequent reasons reported for people with ID in 2023 included:

- the person lost interest in receiving services (30%)
- the VR counselor was unable to locate or contact the individual (21%)
- other reasons (14%), including:
 - disability was too significant
 - death
 - job seeker moved away
 - no disability-related need for services
 - other non-specified reasons

People with other disabilities reported similar reasons for exiting the program without employment.

The Rehabilitation Rate Decreased by 1%

The rehabilitation rate is the proportion of job seekers who exited VR with employment that lasted at least 90 days compared to everyone who received VR services. During the past 10 years, the rehabilitation rate of job seekers with ID has steadily declined from 56% in 2014 to 40% in 2021, although in 2022 it bounced back to 44% and in 2023 it was 43%. The figure for people with other disabilities reflected a similar pattern, declining from 57% in 2015 to 42% in 2021 and then increasing to 45% in 2022 only to slightly decrease to 44% in 2023.

Wages Slightly Decreased after Adjusting for Inflation

HOURLY EARNINGS

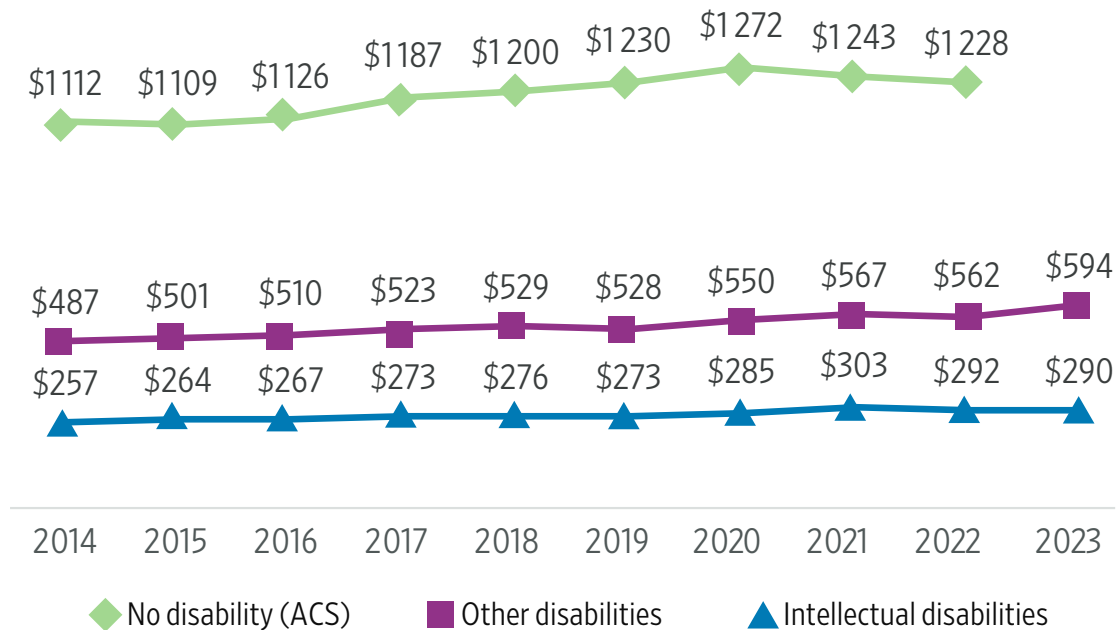
When adjusted for inflation, the hourly wages of workers with ID increased every year from \$10.79 per hour in 2014 to \$13.07 per hour in 2020, although it decreased slightly to \$12.96 in 2023. A similar pattern emerged for people with other disabilities: from \$15.02 in 2014 to \$18.08 in 2020 and \$18.07 in 2023. Wage data were not available for the years 2015–2017.

WEEKLY WAGES

In addition to hourly earnings, it is important to examine weekly wages. Figure 1 compares trends in weekly wages for people with ID to people with other disabilities (RS -911 data), and the general population without disabilities (American Community Survey data). All wage data is adjusted for inflation. In 2023, the weekly wages of people with ID were slightly lower (\$290) compared to 2022 (\$292). However, overall, the weekly wages of people with ID increased by \$32 since 2014 (+1.3 % per year).

The weekly wages of people with other disabilities also increased over time from \$487 in 2014 to \$594 in 2023 (+2% per year).

People with other disabilities earned almost twice as much as people with ID and their wages increased from \$1,112 in 2014 to \$1,228 in 2022 (+2% per year). At the time of this writing, the 2023 wages for people without disabilities were not yet available.

Figure 1. National Trends in Weekly Wages in Constant 2023 Dollars

Note. Weekly wages of the general population were computed by dividing the annual wages of civilians ages 16–64 by 52 weeks using data from the American Community Survey.

Weekly Work Hours Decreased by 1 Hour

In 2023, people with ID who exited the VR program with employment worked an average of 22 hours per week, which is slightly lower compared to 23 hours per week in 2022, but in line with previous years. People with other disabilities reported 31 weekly work hours in 2023, similar to the data reported since 2014 (Table 1).

Time from Application to Exit with Employment Increased by 14 Days

In 2023, it took people with ID an average of 848 days (2 years and 4 months) from application to exit the VR program with a job. This is an increase of 14 days compared to 2022 and continues a trend in job seekers experiencing additional time to exit VR with a job. The shortest amount of time was 684 days in 2018 (about 1 year and 10 months).

People with other disabilities reported a shorter time from application to employment: 801 days (2 years and 4 months) in 2023 compared to 824 days in 2022 (-23 days). The shortest amount of time was 728 days in 2018 (about 2 years).

Another way of looking at this metric is to examine the percentage of people who exited the VR program with employment within one year of application. In 2023, 26% of people with ID exited VR with a job within one year, which is slightly higher than in 2022 (25%), but lower than in 2016 and 2017 (both 33%).

For people with other disabilities, the figure was 39% in 2023. This figure is the highest over the ten years examined.

Longer time from application to exit with employment is not necessarily a negative indicator. For example, someone may have obtained a job within one year of the date of application, but VR may have postponed closing the case to a later time to allow for continued services, in case the person needed job retention supports. In 2014, the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) extended the time frame for the provision of supported employment services from 18 months to 24 months to better support these employment scenarios.

The Majority of People who Exited VR are Male, White, and Transition-age

The majority of people with ID who exited VR programs in 2023 were male (57%) with the remaining self-reporting female (42%) or not self-reporting their gender (0.6%). Similar figures were reported for people with other disabilities (56% male, 43% female, and 0.9% not self-reporting their gender; Table 2).

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics

	Gender				Race and ethnicity						Age	
	Male		Female		White		Black		Hispanic		26 or younger	
	ID (%)	Other (%)	ID (%)	Other (%)	ID (%)	Other (%)	ID (%)	Other (%)	ID (%)	Other (%)	ID (%)	Other (%)
2014	57%	56%	43%	44%	56%	63%	33%	24%	9%	11%	62%	36%
2015	57%	56%	43%	44%	56%	62%	33%	24%	9%	11%	58%	34%
2016	57%	56%	43%	44%	56%	62%	33%	24%	9%	12%	57%	35%
2017	58%	56%	42%	44%	55%	61%	33%	25%	9%	11%	57%	35%
2018	58%	56%	42%	44%	57%	61%	30%	23%	10%	13%	61%	40%
2019	58%	56%	42%	44%	56%	60%	30%	24%	11%	13%	62%	41%
2020	58%	56%	42%	44%	55%	59%	30%	24%	11%	13%	63%	42%
2021	58%	56%	42%	44%	64%	70%	30%	23%	11%	13%	64%	42%
2022	57%	56%	42%	44%	65%	71%	29%	23%	12%	14%	63%	43%
2023	57%	56%	42%	43%	64%	70%	28%	22%	12%	14%	62%	41%

Most people with ID who exited VR in 2023 self-reported that they were white (64%), followed by Black (28%), and people who reported two or more races (4.2%). Similarly, people with other disabilities included a high proportion of white people (70%), followed by Black people (22%), and people who reported two or more races (4.8%). Some of the increase in the percentage of white people after 2020 is due to a change in the definition of the race variable. See the Method section for more details.

Most people with ID who exited the VR program in 2023 were 26 years old or younger at application (62%). This percentage continues a 10-year trend. In contrast, a smaller percentage of people with other disabilities who exited the program in 2023 were 26 years old or younger (41%). This figure was slightly lower than in previous years, after increasing from 34% in 2015.

Outcomes Varied Considerably across States

Table 3 shows, services and outcomes varied widely across states. Rhode Island reported that 97% of people with ID received services, the highest percentage across states, compared to Hawai'i, which reported that 64% of people with ID received services, the lowest percentage across states. In the case of people with other disabilities, the percentage of people receiving services ranged from a high of 93% in DC to a low of 36% in Hawai'i.

The rehabilitation rate is a key indicator of how many people who received services exited the VR program with a job. Washington state reported the highest rehabilitation rate for people with ID (67%), compared to Maine, which reported the lowest rehabilitation rate (23%). For people with other disabilities, the highest rehabilitation rate was reported in Alabama and Mississippi (61%), and the lowest in Hawai'i (15%).

The hourly wage of people with ID varied from a low of \$10.37 in Mississippi to \$16.51 in California. For people with other disabilities, hourly wages varied from \$13.96 in Georgia to \$27.49 in Connecticut. These figures are likely influenced by local level minimum wage legislation and other economic differences across states.

In 2023, weekly work hours varied greatly across states as well. People with ID in Oklahoma worked the most hours per week (28 on average), whereas their peers in Maine reported the lowest amount of work hours per week (13 on average). Among people with other disabilities, the highest weekly work hours were reported in Mississippi (37 weekly work hours), and the lowest weekly work hours were reported in Washington state (25 weekly work hours).

Missouri reported the highest percentage of people with ID exiting VR with a job within one year from application (52%). Hawai'i reported the lowest percentage (0%). People with other disabilities were most likely to exit the VR program with a job within one year in Michigan (70%) and least likely in Hawai'i (4%).

State VR agencies vary widely in the proportion of people with ID in their caseload. In FY 2023, 11% of all closures nationally were people with ID. This percentage ranged from 5% in Massachusetts and Texas to 22% in Indiana. This figure is influenced by various factors, including the state service system's structure and interagency roles in the employment process.

Table 3. State Outcomes in 2023

	Total Closures		Received Services		Rehabilitation Rate		Hourly Wage		Weekly Hours		Got Job in <1 year	
	ID	Other	ID (%)	Other (%)	ID (%)	Other (%)	ID	Other	ID	Other	ID (%)	Other (%)
Alabama	1109	6915	88%	80%	54%	61%	11.43	15.41	27	33	34%	38%
Alaska	55	764	76%	67%	55%	53%	13.67	18.93	22	32	22%	37%
Arizona	482	3923	88%	83%	37%	34%	14.30	16.57	24	30	24%	24%
Arkansas	254	2859	81%	78%	43%	57%	12.59	17.19	26	35	29%	29%
California	2068	25381	87%	77%	39%	35%	16.51	21.57	26	33	27%	38%
Colorado	633	4255	84%	75%	53%	50%	15.06	19.37	19	30	24%	44%
Connecticut	150	1804	87%	89%	38%	58%	14.87	27.49	23	32	16%	52%
Delaware	196	1528	89%	89%	55%	50%	12.76	15.9	24	32	28%	35%
DC	191	1376	96%	93%	58%	41%	16.09	19.46	25	31	24%	32%
Florida	1940	15969	86%	83%	41%	40%	11.98	15.91	21	30	11%	28%
Georgia	1036	4370	86%	84%	31%	23%	10.56	13.96	24	29	15%	22%
Hawai'i	50	489	64%	36%	41%	15%	13.06	18.87	25	29	0%	4%
Idaho	250	2386	74%	69%	41%	39%	11.73	17.99	18	30	18%	36%
Illinois	1145	10527	90%	80%	44%	47%	14.72	16.39	20	28	35%	31%
Indiana	1200	4165	84%	64%	41%	39%	11.21	16.65	20	27	11%	10%
Iowa	829	3775	92%	84%	48%	50%	12.27	16.66	19	31	4%	12%
Kansas	326	1526	77%	75%	53%	39%	11.14	13.97	19	28	37%	38%
Kentucky	696	8556	80%	85%	31%	58%	11.65	21.91	21	34	32%	58%
Louisiana	289	3425	69%	66%	34%	52%	10.47	16	23	34	15%	46%
Maine	346	2174	80%	79%	23%	23%	13.96	19.22	13	29	14%	23%
Maryland	677	3970	81%	71%	30%	29%	14.25	17.52	23	28	9%	15%
Massachusetts	343	6927	90%	85%	56%	48%	15.67	19.55	20	28	32%	27%
Michigan	1133	11481	76%	79%	40%	60%	12.60	22.32	22	34	34%	70%
Minnesota	821	4977	90%	80%	43%	41%	13.66	16.54	18	26	34%	33%
Mississippi	299	5024	77%	89%	31%	61%	10.37	17.46	26	37	14%	59%
Missouri	1076	8392	77%	75%	57%	54%	13.50	16.47	24	30	52%	55%
Montana	130	1472	92%	65%	53%	28%	12.44	16.41	13	26	8%	11%
Nebraska	247	1310	72%	68%	31%	49%	13.22	16.76	22	30	34%	40%
Nevada	193	1729	78%	74%	40%	36%	13.15	17	25	32	27%	33%
New Hampshire	83	971	72%	73%	40%	33%	12.18	17.83	15	28	8%	9%
New Jersey	526	4721	82%	83%	50%	46%	14.52	18.36	21	30	33%	26%
New Mexico	272	2238	76%	61%	35%	29%	12.53	16.8	20	30	16%	20%
New York	1226	20456	73%	81%	26%	24%	14.95	19.34	22	31	17%	16%
North Carolina	2665	9989	82%	70%	37%	34%	11.63	14.05	24	28	31%	30%
North Dakota	139	1465	89%	76%	54%	56%	13.01	18.35	21	33	30%	52%
Ohio	2771	12474	83%	74%	45%	43%	11.94	16.34	21	29	46%	53%
Oklahoma	560	3078	83%	78%	33%	38%	11.59	16.34	28	34	8%	18%
Oregon	740	3737	85%	73%	55%	55%	14.58	19.08	16	27	21%	40%
Pennsylvania	1896	14331	79%	73%	38%	48%	12.27	17.57	22	32	12%	27%
Rhode Island	158	635	97%	90%	39%	38%	13.31	17.21	16	25	8%	14%
South Carolina	484	8200	92%	81%	46%	58%	11.32	17.62	28	35	26%	59%
South Dakota	238	1336	83%	72%	49%	41%	12.20	15.59	19	29	35%	41%
Tennessee	519	2662	79%	68%	55%	54%	12.15	14.93	23	31	31%	34%
Texas	1503	26431	90%	72%	42%	52%	12.42	18.48	25	34	23%	46%
Utah	475	5585	88%	69%	51%	51%	12.14	16.42	21	31	9%	23%
Vermont	114	1828	88%	80%	37%	33%	14.34	20.1	18	31	16%	40%
Virginia	1166	5468	88%	83%	48%	46%	13.02	15.49	22	30	20%	32%
Washington	911	3349	80%	62%	67%	47%	15.75	19.35	14	25	34%	24%
West Virginia	299	2724	75%	79%	24%	52%	12.55	19.35	27	36	26%	54%
Wisconsin	1330	8281	82%	72%	50%	43%	12.19	16.38	17	26	13%	30%
Wyoming	80	895	91%	72%	38%	35%	12.47	18.33	18	32	14%	30%
US	36319	292303	83%	77%	43%	44%	12.96	18.07	22	31	26%	39%

Note. ID = intellectual disabilities; Other = other disabilities.

Method

WHERE ARE THE DATA FROM?

Unless otherwise specified, the data described in this report are from the Rehabilitation Services Administration 911 (RS -911) dataset, a public access database that captures individual characteristics, services provided, and employment outcomes at the point of closure (exit) from the VR program. Records are at the individual level, covering about 328,000 case closures in FY 2023 (Program Year 2022).

WHAT DOES “INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY (ID)” MEAN IN THIS REPORT?

For this report’s purposes, a person is considered to have an intellectual disability (ID) if code 25 (Intellectual Disability) was reported as the cause of either a primary or secondary impairment to employment.

WHAT IS VR CLOSURE?

VR closure refers to whether a person exited the VR program with or without an employment outcome. Most VR closure categories include:

- Closure with an employment outcome after receiving services (formerly Status 26): This means a person stopped receiving VR services because they held a job for at least 90 days. Closure with an employment outcome includes competitive integrated employment, which includes supported employment and self-employment.
- Closure without an employment outcome after receiving services (formerly Status 28): This means a person stopped receiving VR services, even though they did not get a job.
- Closure after eligibility but before an individual plan for employment is developed (formerly status 30): This means a person was eligible to receive VR services but did not move forward with services.
- Any other closure.

WHAT IS THE REHABILITATION RATE?

The rehabilitation rate is the percentage of people who exited VR with employment out of the total number of people who received VR services. Rehabilitation rate is calculated as:

$$\text{closures with an employment outcome} / [\text{closures with an employment outcome} + \text{closures without an employment outcome after receiving services}]$$

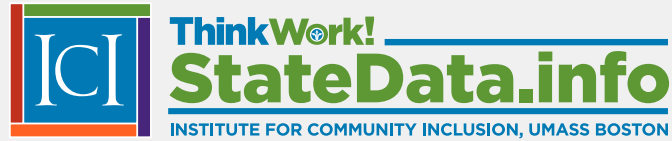
HOW IS RACE DEFINED IN THIS REPORT?

For the years up to 2020, a person’s race was defined by each of the self-reported races, excluding Hispanic. For example, a person was counted as white if they reported to be white and non-Hispanic. The same person was also counted as Asian if they identified also as Asian and non-Hispanic. Therefore, the race variable counted a single person multiple times whenever a person self-reported more than one race.

Starting with the 2021 data, this brief defined race as a mutually exclusive variable and disentangled the race variable from the ethnicity variable. For example, starting in 2021, a person was counted as white only if this was the only race that they reported, regardless of ethnicity. People self-identifying with more than one race are reported as a separate group. This change in the definition of the race variable better aligns with the [“Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity”, U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Civil Rights.](#)

HOW ARE REPORTING PERIODS DEFINED IN THIS REPORT?

The years 2018–2023 in this report refer to the period from July 1 to June 30 and are identified by the year of the last month of that period (June). For example, the year 2023 refers to July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023. This is different from the years before 2017 when the period examined spanned from October 1 to September 30. The year was identified by the last month of that period (September). The change took place in 2017 when RS changed from reporting for the federal fiscal year (October 1 to September 30) to reporting for a program year (July 1 to June 30). The year 2017 was a transition year and refers to only nine months from October 1, 2016, to June 30, 2017.



This Data Note is a product of ThinkWork! at the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston, supported in part by the Administration on Disabilities, Administration for Community Living, US Department of Health and Human Services, under cooperative agreement #90DNP 0002. The opinions contained in this report are those of the grantee and do not necessarily reflect those of the funders.

Data Source

Rehabilitation Services Administration (RS -911, FY2014-2023) and Census Bureau (FY 2014-2023).

Suggested Citation

Migliore, ., Winsor, J., Shepard, J., Butterworth, J. (2024). Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Outcomes of People with Intellectual Disabilities: 2014–2023. Data Note Series, Data Note 89. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.