

Raising Expectations for U.S. Youth with Disabilities: Federal Disability Policy Advances Integrated Employment

At-a-Glance:

Competitive, integrated employment of individuals with significant disabilities is the focus of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act. Community inclusion—where people with disabilities can live and work as independently as possible—is the preferred choice over segregated employment. Emphasis is placed on prevocational services for youth as a pathway to employment. Funding, policies, and service delivery systems must work together to ensure full community inclusion for people with disabilities.

Disability is a normal part of life and should not prevent an individual from full participation in their communities. Vocational rehabilitation professionals play an important role in advocating for youth with disabilities, especially as they transition to adulthood.

Key Findings

Disability is a normal part of life and should not prevent an individual from full participation in their communities. Vocational rehabilitation professionals play an important role in advocating for consumers, especially youth in transition to adulthood.

- Disability is now seen as a combination of an individual's characteristics and the context of their environment rather than as a problem that needs to be fixed.
- Integrated and community-based employment opportunities lead to better outcomes than employment readiness programs and sheltered placements.
- Vocational rehabilitation professionals can best support youth by having a firm grasp of policies guiding community integration.

Putting It into Practice

Advising Youth on Equal Employment Opportunity Requirements

- Job discrimination based on disability is illegal whether the position is federally funded or in the private sector.
- Employers have to make reasonable accommodations so individuals with disabilities can apply for a job, and do the essential functions of a job if they are hired.
- Employees with disabilities deserve equal access to the same benefits as other employees, and to work in an integrated setting with their non-disabled peers.

Limitations to the Requirements

- Employers don't have to provide reasonable accommodations if doing so would create an undue hardship.
- "Reasonable accommodation" does not mean that employers need to lower quality or quantity standards.
- Employers can choose the most qualified individual for a job unless their hiring practices regularly put people with disabilities at a disadvantage.

Challenges Still Exist

- Employment rates for people with disabilities are still much lower than those for their nondisabled peers.
- Some employers still use outdated and contradictory practices to underpay and isolate workers who have disabilities.
- Improvements in transportation, customized employment, and accessible technology are still needed to level the playing field for workers who have disabilities.

More about this Research

Disability research continues to show evidence that community integration benefits both individuals with disabilities and society as a whole. Helping people with disabilities pursue meaningful employment improves inclusion, which increases overall well-being. In addition, 151 nations ratified the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which advocates full inclusion of individuals with disabilities as productive members of their communities.

Learn More

Access this research by visiting the [Project E3 Research Library](#)

Novak J. (2015). Raising expectations for U.S. youth with disabilities: Federal disability policy advances integrated employment. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 5(1), 91-110.

Questions? Feedback?

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Have you tried any of these practices? Have you had success working with these populations in your area? Tell us more and [join our conversation](#).