

The Employment Landscape in Virginia

The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities serves as Virginia's Developmental Disabilities Council. In this capacity the Board advises the Governor, the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, federal and state legislators, and other constituent groups on issues important to people with disabilities in the Commonwealth. The following summarizes the Board's most recent assessment of employment services and outcomes and is intended to serve as a guide for policymakers who are interested in improving the employment outlook for Virginians with disabilities. To see the Board's full assessment, please visit <https://vaboard.org/assessment.htm#2017>

Leading by Values

The Board's work in this area is driven by its vision, values, and the following core beliefs and principles:



Inherent Dignity

All people possess inherent dignity, regardless of gender, race, religion, national origin, or disability status.



Presumed Capacity

All people should be presumed capable of engaging in meaningful, gainful employment and self-direction; and all people deserve opportunities to demonstrate their abilities, to prove themselves in the labor force, and to achieve economic self-sufficiency.



Self-Determination

People with disabilities are experts in their own needs and desires, and they must be included in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.



Integration

People with disabilities have a civil right to receive services and supports in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs and desires, consistent with the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision. Fully integrated employment must be the first and preferred option for all people with disabilities.



Diversity

Diversity is a core value. All people, including people with disabilities, should be valued for contributing to the diversity of the workforce of the Commonwealth.



Freedom from Abuse & Neglect

People with disabilities must be protected from abuse and neglect in all settings where services and supports are provided.



Fiscal Responsibility

Fiscally responsible policies are beneficial for the Commonwealth and they are beneficial for people with disabilities.

Segregated Employment Settings



Too many Virginians with disabilities work in segregated employment settings for compensation that is lower than the national minimum wage.

Type of setting is an important indicator of overall employment outcomes.

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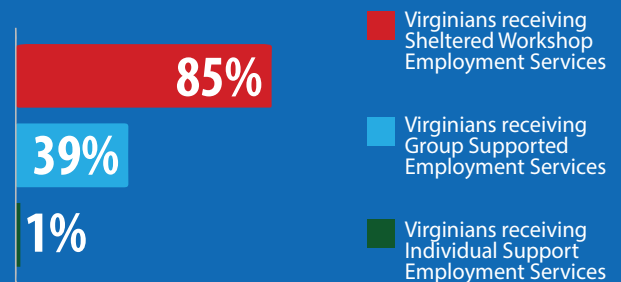
The state has recognized the right of people with disabilities to work in an integrated setting to the maximum extent possible by establishing an *Employment First** policy.

** A framework for systems of change that is centered on the premise that all citizens, including individuals with significant disabilities are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life. (DOL.gov)*

2

People who work in sheltered workshops are far more likely to receive subminimum wages than their peers who work in integrated employment settings.

Percentage of Virginians receiving specific employment services who are paid less than minimum wage



It is unclear whether Virginia is performing better or worse overall than other states. According to the national survey of state disability agencies, more people with disabilities who were receiving state day or employment services had, or were on the pathway towards, a paid job in an integrated setting in Virginia (26%) than nationwide (19%) in 2014 (Institute for Community Inclusion 2015). However, the national survey of people with disabilities found that fewer people with disabilities who were receiving Medicaid waiver services had a paid job in an integrated setting in Virginia (10%) than nationwide (17%) in 2015 (National Core Indicators 2015).

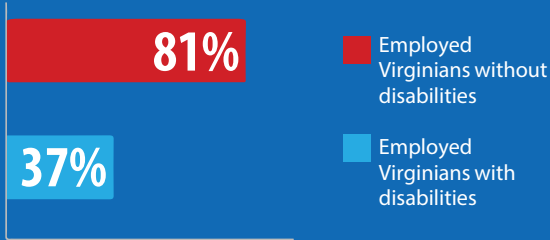
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The Employment Gap

Only about 1 in 3 Virginians with disabilities are employed, and the employment gap between people with and without disabilities has remained fairly stable in recent years.



The resulting employment gap was 44 percentage-points. Similarly, the nationwide average employment gap was similar at 43 percentage-points.



“ A shift in focus of state programs towards a greater emphasis on integrated employment is underway, which will hopefully improve outcomes in the coming years. ”

People with disabilities continue to face multiple barriers to employment, including employer beliefs, negative attitudes towards people with disabilities, a lack of post-secondary education and training opportunities, and fear of losing critical public benefits.

The gap in employment rates between people with and without disabilities has not improved in recent years and is higher than pre-recession levels. People with disabilities are less than half as likely to be employed as people without disabilities.

“ As beliefs and expectations about the capacity of people with significant disabilities to work in competitive, integrated settings change, so too are standards of what constitutes a successful employment outcome. ”

People with disabilities are more likely to experience barriers to employment than those without disabilities. For example, people with disabilities consistently have higher high school dropout rates, lower graduation rates, and are also significantly less likely to obtain post-secondary degrees and occupation-related credentials.

People with disabilities are also the victims of low expectations, conscious and unconscious biases, and discrimination in the labor market (see, e.g., Houtenville 2012).

Barriers to Employment



Virginians with disabilities must overcome multiple unique barriers in order to obtain competitive integrated employment.

Fear of losing critical benefits



Lack of career credentials



Need for workplace accommodations



Lower rates of high school graduation



Employer or coworkers attitudes



Lack of transportation



Lack of access to higher education



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