

November 2006 CMS MIG Conference (Chicago, IL)
Workgroup #3: Employer-based Research

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Session Objectives:

- To identify reasons for pursuing employer-based research
- To identify various methods used to conduct research on employers
- To describe issues related to collecting information from employers
- To provide examples of how employer-based research has been used to inform policy
- To identify useful resources for employer-based research.

Participants identified a number of reasons for pursuing employer based research and identified a variety of different employer based research topics. The notes are organized around the identified topics. The methods, issues, examples and resources identified tend to differ by topic and thus are described for each topic separately.

Employer based research topics

1. Research on strategies to get employers and federal health insurance programs to work together to improve employment of persons with disabilities.

Members of the group were interested in research on new ways of leveraging employer and federal resources to finance health insurance coverage for persons with a disability.

For example, one state commented that employers in their state pushed for the Medicaid Buy-in and that they (employers) were willing to pay into the buy-in for their employees. However, they discovered that employers were not allowed to directly pay into the MBI program as the state originally planned. State wanted to figure out how to allow employers could do so.

One member identified a potential solution. In their state, they bill the person and have the person take the bill to the employer to help pay for costs. While this places the burden on the person, it is a way to allow employers to share the costs.

Additional research seems to be needed on alternative methods to finance health care insurance and the effectiveness of these methods.

2. Research on new ways of obtaining employer information and get employers involved in state activities.

Workgroup members noted that there are limited opportunities to get the attention of employers, and that surveys may not be the best way to engage employers in research activities. Members were interested in finding the most efficient way of obtaining information from employers when opportunities arise.

Some members commented that they tried to obtain data on employers through surveys but that surveys are labor intensive, tend to have poor response rates, and that it is difficult to get large enough samples to identify statistically significant results. In addition, employers may not know or feel comfortable reporting on some items such as the number of persons with disabilities that they employ. Employees are not required to report a disability to their employer and the ADA may make employers reluctant to report estimates.

Others commented that surveys that are conducted by businesses, not by states, tend to be more effective. Employers either don't want to be bothered by the government or don't trust the way that results would be used.

Still other members felt that focus groups work better for getting information on employer attitudes and perceptions.

It may be worthwhile systematically examining different approaches to obtaining data on employers and to identify what methods seemed to be effective and what methods seemed to lead to problems. For example, Maine presented results at the conference on their survey of employers and Cornell University surveyed members of the Society of Human Resource Managers. Research on the strengths and limitations of these, as well as other, survey efforts would be useful to states that are considering different methods to obtain information on employer perceptions and attitudes toward hiring persons with disabilities.

3. Research on job growth and the potential for the development and use of internships.

Some members of the group wanted projections for job growth by occupation and industry, and wanted to start developing internships as a way of getting persons with disabilities experience that they need for such jobs.

Resources for projected job growth by occupation and industry is available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections:
<http://www.bls.gov/emp/>

4. Research on evaluating the effectiveness of job fairs.

Some states have used job fairs as a way of matching persons with disabilities to employers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that both persons with disabilities and employers have had good experiences with job fairs.

Some states expressed interest in tracking outcomes. More specifically, are persons with disabilities obtaining jobs from employers at the job fairs? This information is difficult to track because employers at the job fair are reluctant to report on these outcomes because of the ADA. Obtaining the information from persons with disabilities has also proven to be difficult, re-contacting persons who attend the job fair and obtaining the information is burdensome and can be expensive.

One member suggested obtaining some basic information from job fair attendees that would allow states to track outcomes using administrative data. For example, it may be possible to use the Unemployment Insurance (UI) administrative data to track whether attendees obtained employment and information on the specific employer. This

information could be matched to a list of employers who attended the job fair and allow one to draw inferences on the effectiveness of the job fair.

Research on the utility of administrative data to examine employer behavior and employment outcomes of persons with disabilities is needed.

5. Research devoted to preparation of persons with disabilities to meet the needs of employers.

The group discussed issues of preparing persons with disabilities for employers. In particular, the relative importance of soft skills (communicating effectively with co-workers and supervisors, showing up to work on time, workplace etiquette, etc.) compared with hard skills (training, vocational skill development, professional skill development).

These can be issues regardless of disability, but what are the employers' perceptions with regards to persons with disabilities? Some programs have been developed and tested, states were interested in identifying such programs and learning more about the results of the programs.

6. Research on social marketing.

States were interested in research that shows employers that hiring persons with disabilities is good for the bottom line.

One member pointed out a Chamber of Commerce research study that shows that job tenure of persons with disabilities is longer than those without disabilities. Longer job tenure reduces the hiring and training costs to the employer. Thus, hiring persons with disabilities can be good for the bottom line.

The Department of Labor Office of Disability and Employment Policy (ODEP) is also actively involved in research on social marketing. For more information see the following website: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/categories/employer/>

Some group members suggested that further research on this topic is needed to provide information to employers. In particular, research on state-level efforts and the effectiveness of such efforts.

7. Research that examines methods to develop social networks to match persons with disabilities with employers.

Group members noted that many persons are matched to employers through social networks. Matching person with disabilities to employers may also be done through social networks. Facilitating social networks could take a variety of forms, from volunteering in local organizations to participating more actively in the community.

Little is known on how persons with disabilities use social networks and how they can be used to improve employment outcomes for persons with disabilities. This is another research topic that may be worth examining in the future.

8. Research on self-employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Members discussed research on opportunities for persons with disabilities to be “employers”, or self-employment opportunities.

Some states are conducting projects to examine methods to promote self-employment. Minnesota is conducting a project called Disability Venture, which is designed to provide individual business development support to people with disabilities. As part of the project Minnesota developed an evaluation protocol to identify the impact the project has on promoting small business development resources for people with disabilities. For more information, see

http://www.deed.state.mn.us/pte/PDFs/PTE_Progress_Report.pdf

The Office of Disability Employment Policy is funding pilot projects to investigate, develop, and validate system models likely to increase self-employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The states participating in the project include: New York, Virginia, Florida and Alaska. These projects have just recently been awarded.

9. Research on the use of tax credits aimed at improving employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Group members were interested in existing research and data on this topic. Below are some resources:

GAO Report **GAO-03-39**

“Incentives to Employ Workers with Disabilities Receive Limited Use and Have an Uncertain Impact,” <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d0339.pdf>

Additional resources for different aspects of employer based research

Department of Labor, Office of Disability and Employment Policy: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/>

The Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute conducted a study on employer policies and practices in response to the employment provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), surveying human resource professionals from the memberships of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the Washington Business Group on Health (WBGH). <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/p-survey.cfm>

Syracuse University Burton Blatt Institute is conducting several employer-related research projects. <http://bbi.syr.edu/projects/>

Virginia Commonwealth University RRTC on Workplace Supports and Job Retention <http://www.worksupport.com/>

Chamber of Commerce for Individuals with DisAbilities (CCID) <http://www.chamber4us.org/>