



Technical Assistance Center for
Quality Employment

Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Veterans with Disabilities

**Outcomes, Barriers, Challenges, and
Opportunities to Improve**

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Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment

Goal: The Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment will increase the number and quality of employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities through training and technical assistance to State VR agency personnel.

The VRTAC-QE will support State VR agency personnel to implement innovative and effective employment strategies and supporting practices.



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Acknowledgement & Disclaimer:

The contents of this presentation were developed with support from the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration (CFDA H264-K200003).

The ideas, opinions, and conclusions expressed are those of the presenters and do not represent recommendations, endorsements, or policies of the U.S. Department of Education.



Learning Objectives

- Understand and analyze national Veteran statistics, including disability and unemployment statistics
- Identify available VR services for Veterans with disabilities
- Examine effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services for Veterans with disabilities
- Identify employment and service-seeking challenges and barriers for Veterans with disabilities
- Analyze opportunities to improve VR outcomes for Veterans with disabilities



Understanding U.S. Veterans and VR Services for Veterans with Disabilities



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Understanding Veterans with Disabilities



According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, based on 38 U.S.C. § 101(2), the term “veteran” means “a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable” (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2019).

National Veteran Statistics

- The weighted estimate of the number of veterans is 18.3 million, of which 1.6 million are women.
- Veterans (Mage = 64) are significantly older than the non-Veteran population (Mage = 44).
- Only 23% of Veterans are minorities compared to 37% of non-Veterans minorities.
- Female Veterans were more likely to have some college and bachelor's degree and an advanced degree compared to male Veterans and female non-Veterans.



National Veterans with Disabilities Statistics

- While 21.8% of Veterans have service-connected disability status, 34.1% of those Veterans have 70% or higher disability rating
- Female Veterans (25.1%) reported higher-service connected disabilities than male Veterans (22.8%)
- Approximately 100,000 Veterans received Vocational Rehabilitation services (e.g., CWT) from the VA in FY 2017, even though 9.8 million Veterans used at least one VA benefit or service the same year
- About 68% of White Veterans with service-connected disabilities used health care services, compared to 77.4% Black or African American Veterans, 62.5% of Asian Veterans, 70.9% AIAN Veterans, 66.5% Native Hawaiians and or other Pacific Islanders, and 71.5% Hispanic Veterans

Employment, Poverty, and Homelessness

- Veterans are more likely than the non-veteran population to experience employment difficulties.
- Only 44.2% of Veterans are employed, which is lower than non-Veterans (61.2%).
- Black or African American Veterans (3.3%) were more likely to have lower unemployment rates compared to their non-Veteran counterparts (5.0%).
- Minority Veterans were less likely to live in poverty compared to non-Veteran minorities. Male veterans had a higher median household income than female veterans.
- Homelessness is a significant public health and rehabilitation concern among Veterans. 16% of the homeless population are Veterans although only 10% of the total population is Veteran.

VR Services for Veterans with Disabilities

Veterans with disabilities (e.g., service-connected disabilities) may receive VR services from both the VA and state VR agencies.

- *Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E)*, referred to as the Chapter 31 program, provides VR services to eligible service members and veterans with service-connected disabilities to help them prepare for, obtain, and maintain suitable employment or achieve independent living.
- *Compensated Work Therapy (CWT)* is a VA clinical vocational rehabilitation program (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020a). CWT staffs develop partnership with organizations, companies, and government agencies who need employees with proven abilities to produce high quality work.
- Veterans with disabilities may seek VR services from *State VR programs* in their residence state. The eligibility for veterans to participate in VR and employment services veterans may change from state to state. It is important to note that the collaboration between State VR programs and VA VR programs could improve employment outcome in veterans with disabilities.

Effectiveness of VR Services and Programs for Veterans with Disabilities



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Effectiveness of VR Services and Programs (1)

- VR services significantly improve employment outcomes among people with disabilities.
- VA VR services and benefits helped veterans with disabilities develop new skills, qualifications, and networking to secure a job that accommodates their disabilities.
- Veterans who joined in community-based transitional work experience were over 2.5 times more likely than individuals working in a workshop to be discharged to competitive employment, over twice as likely to be discharged to any kind constructive activity, and 1.6 times more likely to be “successfully” discharged.
- VA VR services should focus more on community-based vocational services instead of institution-based workshop programs.

Effectiveness of VR Services and Programs (2)

- Competitive employment rates were higher among veterans who received 12-week cognitive rehabilitation intervention embedded within VR services compared to control group received client-centered therapy that did not focus on employment or cognitive rehabilitation.
- Those who received 12-week cognitive rehabilitation intervention embedded within VR services had improved days worked, hours worked, and money earned.
- The odds of white veterans successfully returning to work were nearly 1½ times the odds of African American veterans returning to work and (b) African American female veterans had the lowest probability for successfully returning to work. Moreover, findings indicated that African American veterans' successful return-to-work rates in 5 of the 10 RSA regions were below the national benchmark.

Barriers and Challenges in VR Services and Programs



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Barriers and Challenges in VR Services and Programs (1)



- Health problems
- VA bureaucratic processes
- VA and academic programs that did not accommodate the needs of veterans with disabilities
- Fear of benefits loss
- Staffing problems

Barriers and Challenges in VR Services and Programs (2)



- Transition-related factors
- Heterogeneous veteran population and their different needs
- Lack of communication among professionals and agencies
- Different employment data sources
- Lack of preparation returning to a job
- Staff with lack of understanding of needs of veterans with disabilities

Opportunities to Improve VR Services for Veterans with Disabilities



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Opportunities to Improve VR Services for Veterans with Disabilities (1)



- Veteran motivation, caregiver and family support, and engaged VA and academic counselors were key factors in improving the use of VA vocational and educational services.
- An efficient VA application process and a proficient staff were very important facilitators of VA vocational and educational service use.
- Veterans also believed that VR specialists are important in helping them effectively use VA vocational and educational services.
- Veterans reported that when academic institutions support them, there is an increase in the academic success of veteran, which may increase their employment outcomes.

Opportunities to Improve VR Services for Veterans with Disabilities (2)



- Johnson et al. (2017) examined perceptions of state vocational rehabilitation agency administrators on State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies (SVRA) and VA-VR&E Programs and it was identified that co-service practices could improve employment outcomes among minority Veterans with disabilities (Johnson et al., 2017).
 - SVRA administrators reported sometimes to usually, in their collaborations with VA-VR&E Programs, to serve minority Veterans with disabilities.
 - SVRA administrators reported sometimes to usually, in their prior collaborations with VA-VR&E Programs, to serve minority Veterans with disabilities.
 - Participants were rarely involved in conflict resolution procedure development with VA-VR&E.
 - Participants were sometimes too often involved in the referral procedure with VA-VR&E.

Opportunities to Improve VR Services for Veterans with Disabilities (3)



- Frain et al. (2010) reported that the rehabilitation counseling field should have further training and curriculum-related activities that introduce veterans, the rehabilitation needs of veterans, and the overall challenges that affect veterans with disabilities in their daily life.
 - Rehabilitation counselors should be familiar with techniques to screen physical and mental illnesses among veterans, suggesting that the field of rehabilitation counseling should expand its curriculum and training materials to cover the needs of veterans with disabilities.
 - Rehabilitation counselors need to understand these specific employment-related needs among veterans.
 - Rehabilitation counselors may aim to improve self-management behaviors in Veterans with disabilities.
 - Rehabilitation counselors could facilitate the development of overall family resilience in Veterans and their family members, so they are better equipped to face daily challenges, stress and pressure.

Thank you!

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