



READY, WILLING, AND ABLE TO WORK

Supporting Employers to Hire Workers with Disabilities

BACKGROUND

People with disabilities contribute to Wisconsin's workforce. However, many people with disabilities have difficulty finding jobs, and too often wages are inadequate (in many cases sub-minimum wage) to support independent living while reducing reliance on public benefits.

People with disabilities represent 9% of Wisconsin's workforce; yet their employment rate is less than a third the rate for non-disabled workers. Workers with disabilities annually earn 30% less than workers without disabilities. Overall, 27% of Wisconsin's citizens with disabilities live in poverty.

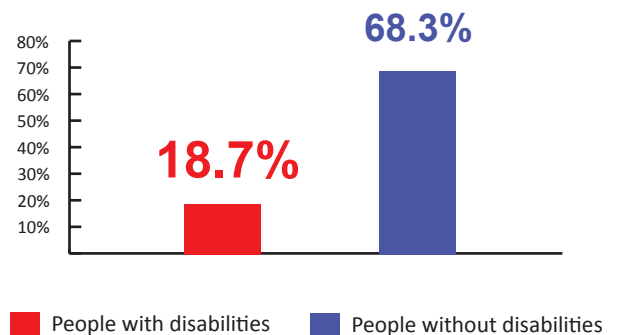
Some Wisconsin employers already see the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. Walgreens' research shows their employees with disabilities add to the bottom line through increased productivity and reduced staff turnover. Yet Wisconsin employers need supports to overcome misperceptions about liability concerns, to understand the minimal costs of most workplace accommodations and reduce negative assumptions about worker abilities.

For the 45,000 individuals with disabilities in Wisconsin's long-term support system, obtaining employment in integrated community jobs with comparable wages to others is even more challenging. Only 8% of working-age Family Care members and 4% of participants in Wisconsin's Self-Directed Support program (IRIS) are working at community jobs. Another 11% of long-term support participants are in facility-based employment, earning on average only \$2.43 an hour.

Improving integrated community job opportunities enables people with disabilities to contribute to local economies, more fully participate in their communities, lifts them out of poverty, and reduces overall reliance on public benefits.

¹ Supported employment is an evidence-based approach to helping people with disabilities participate in competitive work in integrated work settings. Nationally, supported employees generated a monthly net benefit of \$251.34. For every dollar of costs to taxpayers in funding supported employment, taxpayers received an average of \$1.46 in benefits.

EMPLOYMENT PARTICIPATION RATES



LOW EMPLOYMENT RATES: Despite the fact that 80% of people with disabilities say they want to work, **only 18.7% actually have jobs**, compared to 68.3% of people without disabilities.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2013.

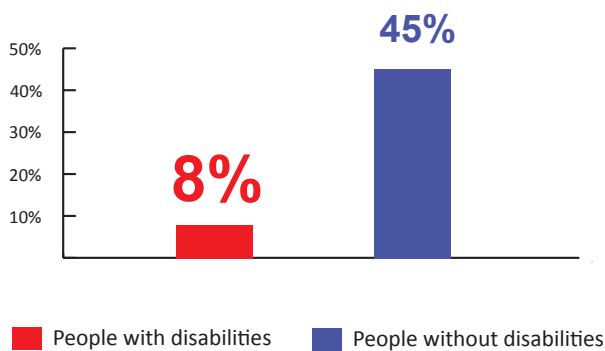
BENEFITS TO BUSINESS

Businesses and employers of all types are looking for skilled workers and are finding them among people with disabilities.

- Businesses are looking for **skilled workers** to fill open positions and have been struggling to do so over the past few years.
- Businesses **report positive outcomes** from employing people with disabilities. Walgreens has experienced a 120 percent productivity increase at a distribution center made universally accessible for employees with disabilities.
- Global companies like Microsoft and Merck have said that they must **employ a workforce that reflects their consumer base**, which includes people with disabilities.

Source: National Governors Association; "A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities, A Blueprint for Governors"; 2013.

REDUCED EMPLOYEE TURNOVER



QUALIFIED, COMMITTED EMPLOYEES: Employers realize cost-savings with a more stable, fully-trained workforce. The **turnover rate for employees with disabilities is 8%** in comparison to 45% for other workers.

Source: 2003 Crain's Chicago Business Survey; Washington Mutual, Inc. Study.

EMPLOYING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IMPROVES BUSINESS



ENHANCED BUSINESS IMAGE: Targeting the disability community as a customer and labor source provides a competitive advantage. **87% of customers say they would prefer to patronize businesses employing people with disabilities.**

Source: Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, Parker; "A national survey of consumer attitudes towards companies that hire people with disabilities"; University of Massachusetts, Boston, MA; Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation; 2005.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Disability Rights Wisconsin, People First Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities recommend the following policy changes to improve job opportunities for people with disabilities in Wisconsin:

- **Establish performance targets** in state programs that support people with disabilities to continually improve employment outcomes.
- **Require annual reporting** by state agencies on their efforts to improve employment of people with disabilities, including people with the most significant disabilities.
- **Strengthen statewide funding** for employment supports [e.g. benefits counseling, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's On-the-Job Training, Individual Placement and Supports (IPS) for people with mental illness, job development].
- **Change state use contracting policies** to (A) require contractors to pay workers with disabilities at least minimum wage; and (B) support small businesses owned by people with disabilities.
- **Develop a business-to-business mentoring** and technical assistance system in which businesses wanting to hire workers with disabilities can connect and consult with similar businesses that are more experienced in hiring and retaining workers with disabilities.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information, including additional recommendations, contact:

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