

NEWS RELEASE
NCD #10-596
January 20, 2010
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202-272-2004

National Council on Disability Calls for Government Leaders to Ensure Availability and Quality of Future Workforce Services for People with Disabilities

WASHINGTON—The National Council on Disability (NCD) today released a report titled *Workforce Infrastructure in Support of People with Disabilities: Matching Human Resources to Service Needs*, calling for policymakers at all levels of government to proactively address current shortages and examine how labor market changes are driving both current and future supply.

Americans with disabilities depend on the disability workforce infrastructure, which consists of health, education, and social services programs. The need for these services is expected to increase significantly in the coming decades as a result of several factors. First, the elderly population of the United States is large and growing rapidly. Since disability rates increase with age, population aging will bring substantial increases in the number of people with disabilities and will have a significant impact on the nation's human service and support needs. Second, improvements in child survival rates mean that more children are born today with birth defects and developmental disabilities than ever before, and many of them will require access to a host of human services and supports throughout their lives. At the same time, large numbers of baby boomers are reaching retirement age, which means that many fewer human service workers will be available. These trends threaten both the availability and quality of future services for people with disabilities.

NCD's research for this report has been aimed at better positioning the human resources sector for the future; for example, by providing data and information that organizations can use to understand the supply-demand gaps in the disability-related workforce and to make plans to fill those gaps. The research has also aimed at building industry capability to influence the nature and content of training, as well as capability to manage a sustainable, skilled disability workforce in the future. Finally, in an effort to reflect a holistic view of a community's workforce expectations, the research has been aimed across all relevant segments of the disability workforce, not just at a select handful of human service occupations.

According to NCD Chairperson Linda Wetters, "Numerous forecasts based on diverse trends all point to a shortage of qualified workers to meet the needs of the disability population. People with disabilities occupy a strategic place in America's ability to compete. Either their talents and ambitions will be developed into a resource for our society, or they will remain on the margins, battling for shrinking resources."

This report presents recommendations that call for partnerships among federal departments and agencies, their State counterparts, and the private sector, including organizations involved with education/training, health care, and employment services. NCD calls for policymakers at all levels of government to proactively address these shortages and examine how labor market changes are driving both current and future supply.

Some of those recommendations include:

- Establish a mechanism to track ongoing economic, social, labor market, and professional developments so that new information can be used to redirect planning and actions in support of the disability services infrastructure.
- Establish systematic efforts to acquire information on the supply of infrastructure workers.
- Ensure that partnership opportunities are encouraged between the public and private sectors.
- Promote opportunities to encourage new entrants into critical infrastructure occupations, such as home health aide, personal care assistant, mental health worker, and rehabilitation counselor.
- Infrastructure employers will have to increase the salaries and benefits, and provide training to upgrade the skills and value of their employees if they are to attract and maintain a suitable infrastructure workforce.

“We are proud to have contributed to NCD’s latest research,” said Martha Artiles, global chief diversity officer, Manpower Inc. “As a company that is dedicated to enriching people’s lives with quality employment opportunities, we fully support this effort to enhance the workforce infrastructure for people with disabilities. We hope that the public and private sector will act on the recommendations and harness the power of this underutilized population.”

The purpose of NCD, an independent federal agency, is to promote programs, practices, policies and procedures that ensure full inclusion of people with disabilities into all aspects of society. NCD accomplishes this mission by providing advice and making recommendations to the President, Congress, governmental agencies, and other stakeholders.

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