



# University of Connecticut Health Center

December 2011

## Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Needs Assessment: Provider Survey

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

The Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) is funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), designed to support the competitive employment of people with disabilities, and was awarded to the Connect to Work Center at the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS). The grant is intended to facilitate improvements to the state Medicaid program and services, to promote linkages between Medicaid and other employment-related service agencies and to develop a comprehensive system of employment supports for people with disabilities.

The MIG Steering Committee adopted the name “Connect-Ability” to refer to both the entire MIG effort and to the statewide technical assistance center, designed to be the premier state resource center for employment information at the individual, programmatic and policy levels.

To further the strategic planning process for the successful employment of people with disabilities in Connecticut, a second MIG Needs Assessment was conducted in 2011. Similar to the 2006 Needs Assessment, employers, service providers and people with disabilities were surveyed. The purpose of the Provider Survey was to learn more about employment practices and issues experienced by various service providers across Connecticut related to employing people with disabilities.

### **Background**

Although the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 prohibits discrimination in all employment practices against qualified individuals with disabilities and guarantees equal opportunity in employment (Wooten & James, 2005), more than two decades after the enactment of the ADA, progress in implementation remains slow and people with disabilities continue to represent a largely untapped pool of labor (Harris Interactive, 2010).

Highlights of the *2010 Survey of Employment of Americans with Disabilities* suggest that although disability is on the radar for some employers, most are not hiring people with disabilities even though they recognize the importance of doing so, and few are proactively striving to make positive changes in the employment environment for them (Harris Interactive, 2010).

While providers are a resource to employers and people with disabilities, the divide existing between service providers and employers is a major barrier that needs to be overcome in addressing the high unemployment rate of people with disabilities (Unger, Wehman, Yasuda, Campbell, & Green, 2002).

Needs assessments and stakeholder feedback regarding ways to close the gap between providers and employers are necessary to overcome barriers and create a better employment environment for individuals with disabilities.

### **Methodology and Analysis**

The primary method of data collection was a web-based questionnaire that asked providers to describe their role, the services they provide, and experiences with employers. Additional

questions assessed barriers to employment for people with disabilities and adequacy of available services, experiences with adult clients and their attitudes and barriers to employment, experiences with youth in transition and parents and their attitudes and barriers to employment, and familiarity with Connect-Ability.

The sample included 128 respondents from various service provider organizations across the state, representing a 52 percent response rate.

Survey responses were collected in a secure online database and analyzed question by question, with a series of basic indicators including frequency, average, and percentage.

## **Results**

### Of the providers who participated in the survey:

- 37% were ages 51-60, 29% were ages 41-50, and 22% were ages 31-40
- 66% were female
- 91% were White or Caucasian

### Of the organizations that participated in the survey:

- 35% of respondents were either supervisors or managers and 31% were in senior executive positions in their organization
- 73% were not for profit, 16% were for profit, and 12% were government agencies

### Types of services providers offer people with disabilities:

- 80% employment supports and job skills
- 45% youth transition support
- 44% mental health services
- 42% education/awareness programs
- 41% transportation
- 38% home care or day care
- 36% housing support
- Less than a quarter offer health care (19%), addiction services (16%), AT acquisition or support (16%) or legal or advocacy (13%) services

### Types of disabilities served by organizations:

- 85% developmental/cognitive
- 63% mental health
- 54% physical including TBI
- 43% deafness and hearing
- 40% blindness and vision
- 30% drug or alcohol addiction

### Organizational experiences

Eighty-five percent of providers serve adults ages 18 to 64 and more than half (52%) target youth in transition. Under half of providers (44%) serve adults over age 64, and 24 percent target children from birth to age 15.

### Challenges and barriers

More than half of providers (63%) believe people with disabilities are usually only interested in part time work. Fifty-four percent of providers agree that people with disabilities do not seek employment because the job opportunities are not satisfying enough.

### Adequacy of services and programs

Providers indicated the adequacy of services and programs that support recruiting, hiring, and promotion. Over half of respondents indicated that life skills and job coaches/mentoring programs were adequate (58% and 60%, respectively). The following were noted to be less than adequate:

- 79% disability employer awareness programs
- 73% public transportation
- 65% internship or student work
- 65% job postings
- 62% on-the-job training

### Challenges for employers

Over half of providers agree employers are reluctant to hire someone they know has a mental illness disability (84%), a developmental disability (71%), or a physical disability (68%). Seventy-eight percent of respondents disagree that employers understand that the benefits outweigh the costs of hiring an employee with a disability and 75 percent disagree that employers encourage job applications from people with disabilities.

### Challenges for students with disabilities

While a greater percentage of providers believe parents encourage their children with disabilities to do job skills training and to seek employment, they are conflicted regarding whether or not students with a disability receive adequate support to learn basic life skills. More than half of providers (55%) disagree that families receive sufficient information about their students' disabilities and the available resources and supports.

### Connect-Ability

Most providers (82%) had heard of Connect-Ability with more than half (55%) hearing about it through BRS. While others heard about Connect-Ability through the media, 30 percent learned of it through collaboration with colleagues and at various meetings.

## **Conclusions**

This study contributes to our understanding of the persistent low employment rate of people with disabilities by exploring employment practices and issues experienced by service providers across Connecticut related to people with disabilities.

There has been some progress in the employment of people with disabilities in Connecticut over the past four years that should be noted. Providers participating in focus groups as part of the 2006 needs assessment pointed out the lack of information about available employment resources and the need to have a single source for all information. The 2011 provider survey results demonstrate significant changes that have occurred since then including the development of a Technical Assistance Center that has become Connecticut's primary source and a single point of entry to inform employers, employees, services providers, and job seekers about employment issues and people with disabilities.

On the negative side, some of the challenges and barriers that providers identified in 2006 continue to be problematic in 2011 including a lack of meaningful job opportunities for people with disabilities, concerns about accommodations and benefits, and the inadequacy of certain services and programs. As in 2006, providers are still concerned about employers' lack of awareness and knowledge about people with disabilities and their reluctance to hire them. They also continue to report challenges in assisting people with mental illness. For youth with disabilities, providers underscore the need for improved transitional services including the school's greater role in educating parents and students and the necessity to help students develop life skills in addition to workforce preparation.

Connect-Ability should use the results of this report and its expanding name recognition to focus future efforts on the gaps providers identified. It should also consider allocating resources towards the programs providers identified as challenges for both employers and students with disabilities. This will help minimize employment barriers and ensure a productive and accessible infrastructure.

## **I. Introduction**

The Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) is funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and designed to support the competitive employment of people with disabilities. Awarded to the Connect to Work Center at the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), the grant is intended to facilitate improvements to the state Medicaid program and services, to promote linkages between Medicaid and other employment-related service agencies and to develop a comprehensive system of employment supports for people with disabilities. The MIG Steering Committee adopted the name “Connect-Ability” to refer to both the entire MIG effort and to the statewide technical assistance center, designed to be the premier state resource center for employment information at the individual, programmatic and policy levels.

To achieve these goals and strengthen the employment infrastructure for Connecticut residents with disabilities, Connecticut is implementing a comprehensive, statewide strategic plan. As a first step in the strategic planning process, beginning in January 2006 the Connect to Work Center contracted with the University of Connecticut Health Center (UCHC) to conduct a statewide needs assessment for the MIG. With direct guidance from the MIG Steering Committee, the UCHC research team developed a multi-pronged approach to contact people with disabilities, employers, and service providers throughout Connecticut to assess their experiences, attitudes, and observations about employment for persons with disabilities. Distinct research activities and results of the 2006 assessment are available at [http://www.connect-ability.com/media/pdf/research/Final\\_MIG\\_Needs\\_Assessment\\_with\\_appendices\\_8-31-06.pdf/](http://www.connect-ability.com/media/pdf/research/Final_MIG_Needs_Assessment_with_appendices_8-31-06.pdf/).

To assess the progress made in the implementation of the strategic plan for the successful employment of people with disabilities, and to provide data to inform the continuing priorities of Connect-Ability, a second MIG Needs Assessment was conducted in 2011. Similar to the 2006 Needs Assessment, employers, service providers and people with disabilities were surveyed. The purpose of the Provider Survey was to learn more about employment practices and issues experienced by various service providers across Connecticut related to employing people with disabilities. Research activities and results of the 2011 reports on employers and people with disabilities are available at <http://www.connect-ability.com/media/pdf/research>.

## **II. Background**

Although the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 prohibits discrimination in all employment practices against qualified individuals with disabilities and guarantees equal opportunity in employment (Wooten & James, 2005), more than two decades after the enactment of the ADA, progress in implementation remains slow and people with disabilities continue to represent a largely untapped pool of labor (Harris Interactive, 2010).

In 2005, approximately 55 million Americans (19%) – or one in five people – reported some level of disability (Brault, 2008). In the same year in the United States, there were an estimated 22 million working-age people with disabilities. Of these, approximately 13 million were unemployed and 8 million were employed (Lengnick-Hall, Gaunt, & Kulkarni, 2008). Only about 2 million of the 8 million that were employed were working full-time (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008).

Statistics indicate that people with disabilities are available to work, but despite signs of progress, research shows that employment opportunities in the competitive labor market continue to be limited for individuals with disabilities. Barriers to employment have imposed

significant economic and social costs on society and have undermined many well-intentioned efforts to rehabilitate and employ people with disabilities. While providers are a resource to employers and people with disabilities, the divide existing between service providers and employers is a major barrier that needs to be overcome in addressing the high unemployment rate of people with disabilities (Unger, Wehman, Yasuda, Campbell, & Green, 2002). Employers who are hiring people with disabilities tend to use informal methods, such as referrals, to recruit employees with disabilities (Carey, Potts, Bryen, & Shankar, 2004; Rankin, 2003) and do not use service provider agencies to the full extent because they don't understand the benefits these agencies offer in matching a qualified candidate's skills with employer needs (Harris Interactive, 2010).

Recent research (Harris Interactive, 2010) demonstrates that compared to 1995:

- fewer companies today have a disability policy or program (66% vs. 29%, respectively)
- only one in five companies currently has a specific person/department to oversee the hiring of people with disabilities (40% vs. 19%, respectively)
- fewer companies offer disability-related education programs (63% vs. 18%, respectively)
- fewer employers in 2010 report hiring people with disabilities (64% vs. 56%, respectively)

These findings underscore the need for providers' services and perspectives in bridging the gap between people with disabilities and employers through targeting service usage and employment supports.

### **III. Methodology and Analysis**

#### Survey instrument

The survey questionnaire was based on the questions asked in the 2006 Needs Assessment focus groups and key informant interviews with service providers. The questions included: information about the role and demographics of the respondent; description of provider services; experiences with employers and barriers to employment for people with disabilities and adequacy of available services; experiences with adult clients and their attitudes and barriers to employment; experiences with youth in transition and parents and their attitudes and barriers to employment; and familiarity with Connect-Ability.

There were a total of 14 closed-ended questions (Appendix A). The survey was designed to take about 10 to 15 minutes and was provided as a web-based survey. Survey data were collected remotely via a secured website and were collected anonymously without any identifying information links to the provider. The provider survey utilized a single identifier code to enter the survey website for all provider participants.

#### Research sample

The target research sample consisted of various service providers. Service providers' contact information was obtained using the Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) database



available at BRS and the private providers list on the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) website. A total of 246 service providers were identified.

### Recruitment

An invitation letter (Appendix B) asking service providers to participate in the survey was distributed across the state of CT to 246 service providers. The letter briefly described the purpose of the survey and how the survey would be conducted. All providers with email addresses received the invitation letter by mass email. Additional providers without email addresses were sent the letter by mail to the mailing address available in the CRP database. Between March 1, 2011 and May 15, 2011, biweekly email reminders were sent to providers with email addresses to ensure the achievement of an adequate response rate.

Provider organizations were able to confidentially contact the UCHC research team with any questions via email. All communications received and sent were maintained confidentially by the research team.

To encourage provider organizations to participate an incentive was provided. All provider organizations who submitted a completed survey were offered the opportunity to voluntarily enter their email address into a separate database to be eligible for one of ten \$50 gift cards. The email addresses were maintained confidentially and separately from the survey responses.

### Response rate

Two hundred and thirty-nine service providers in Connecticut received e-mail invitations. One hundred-twenty eight providers opened the survey. Of the 128, 122 completed the entire survey and 6 surveys were complete at least through question 6, and were included in the data. One hundred-eighteen providers did not respond. The 128 surveys represent a 52 percent response rate (Table 1). The target response rate for providers was 50 percent.

Table 1. Final Response Rate

<b>Survey Responses and Final Response Rate</b>	
Number of invitations e-mailed/mailed	246
Total number of surveys opened	128
Number of fully completed surveys	122
Number of partially completed surveys	6
Final Response Rate: $128/246=52\%$	

### Analysis

The survey responses were collected in a secured database. Data were exported for analysis using SPSS 19.0, a statistical software package designed for both simple and complex analyses. Data were analyzed question by question, with a series of basic indicators computed:

frequency, average, and percentage. All responses were summarized as a group. Descriptive statistics include descriptions of providers' demographics and organizational characteristics (Q1-6) and summary analysis of responses to questions about organizational experiences (Q7-14).

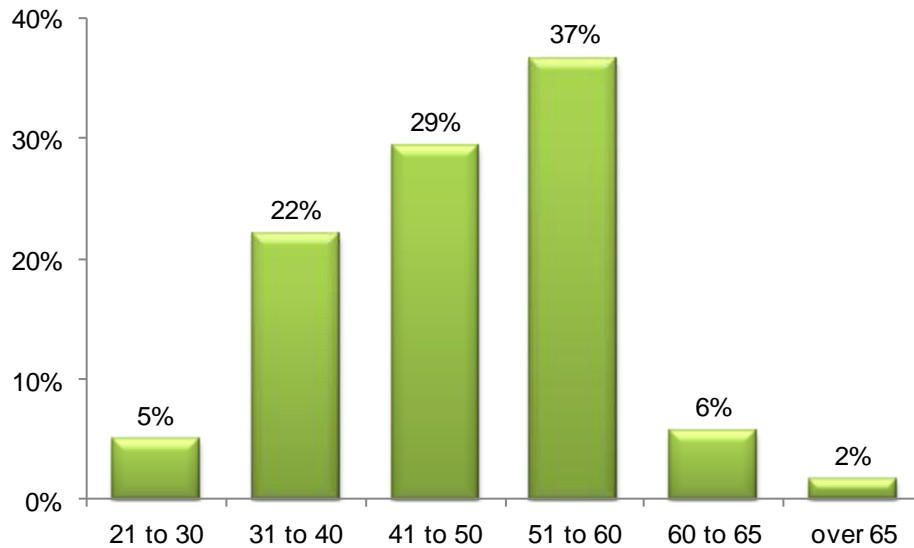
#### IV. Results

##### Provider demographics

##### Age

Of those who responded to the survey, more than one-third (37%) were ages 51 to 60 and nearly one-third (29%) of respondents were ages 41 to 50 (Figure 1).

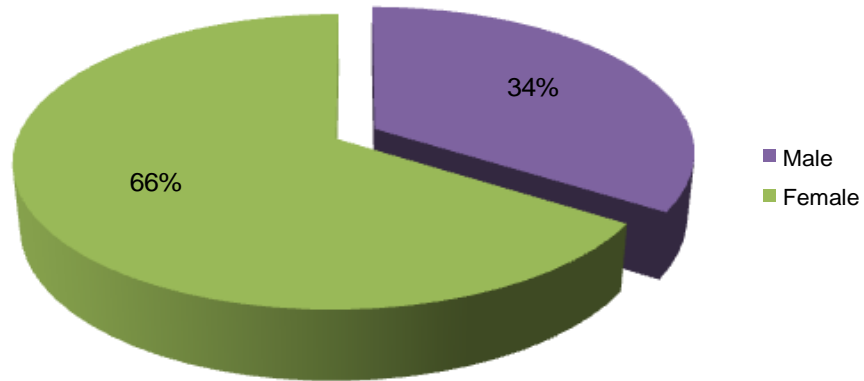
Figure 1. Age of respondents



##### Gender

Two-thirds of respondents were female (66%) (Figure 2).

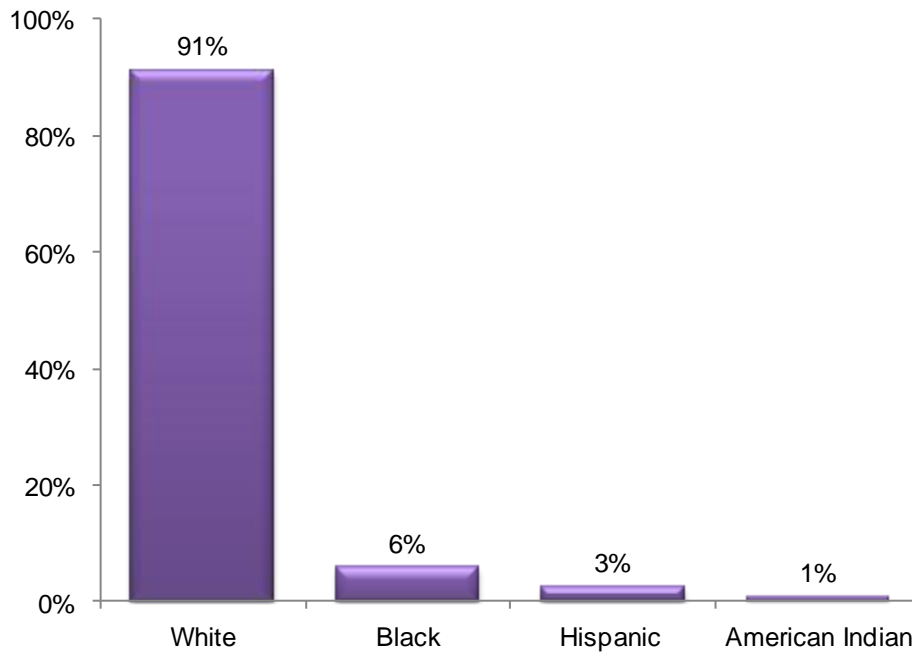
Figure 2. Gender of respondents



Ethnicity

Almost all respondents were White or Caucasian (91%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Ethnicity of respondents



Organizational characteristics

Location of providers

There was a wide distribution of responses by zip code, representing 52 towns. Several zip codes had four or more providers represented. These results are shown in Table 2.

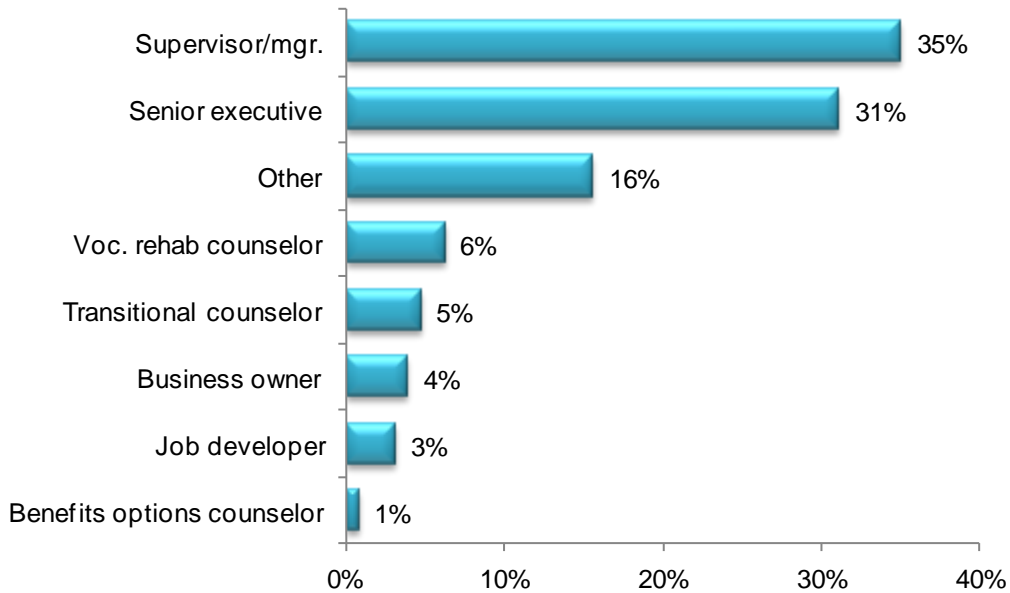
Table 2. Zip codes

Town	Zip Code	Frequency	Percent
Norwich	06360	6	4.8%
Middletown	06457	5	4.0%
Torrington	06790	5	4.0%
Naugatuck	06770	4	3.2%
Danbury	06810	4	3.2%

Job title

Of those who responded to the survey, over one-third (35%) were either supervisors or managers of their provider and nearly one-third (31%) were in senior executive positions. Sixteen percent of respondents indicated “other,” which includes directors, administrative assistants, and benefits coordinators. Eleven percent of respondents were either vocational rehabilitation or transitional counselors (11%) and 8 percent were either a business owner, job developer, or a benefits options counselor.

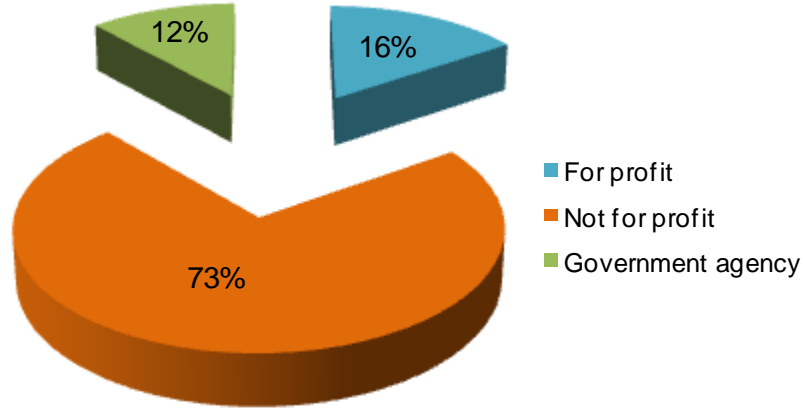
Figure 4. Job title



Legal status

Providers indicated the legal status of their organization as either not for profit (73%), for profit (16%), or a government agency (12%) (Figure 5).

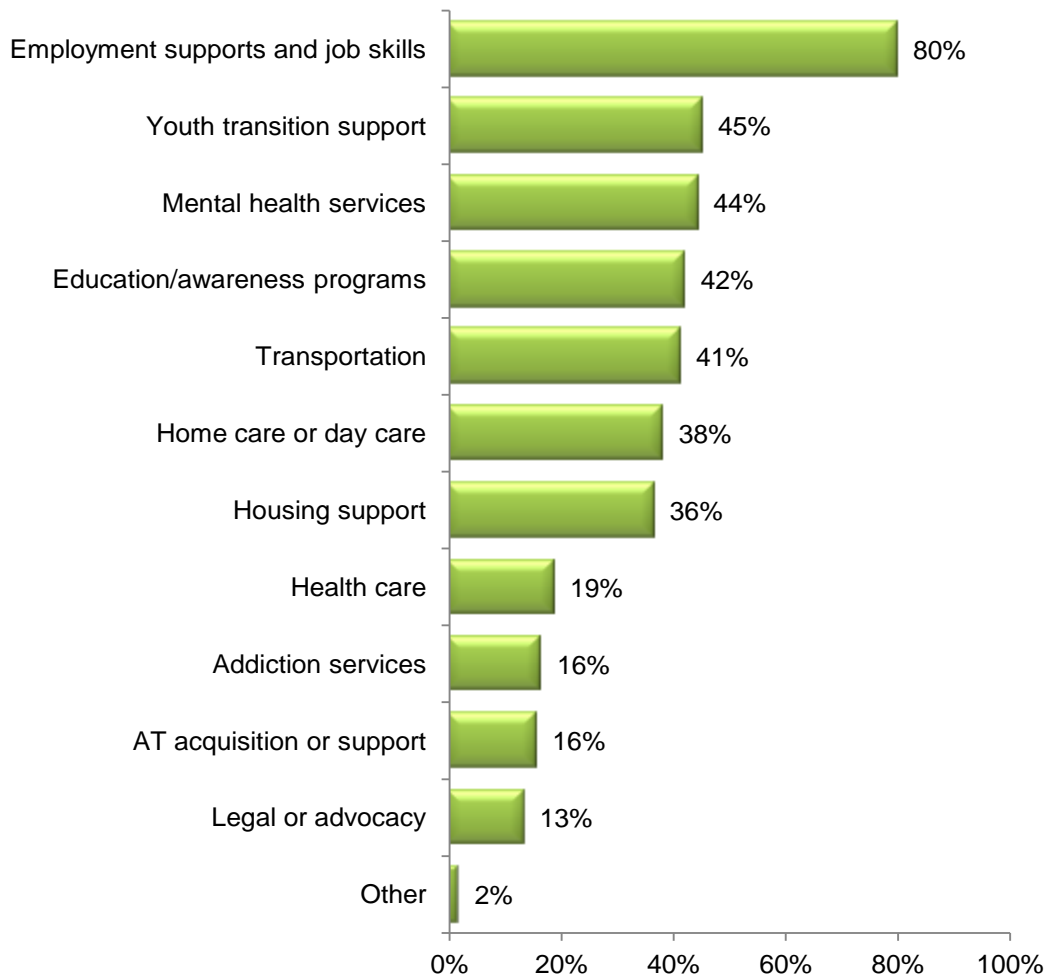
Figure 5. Legal status of organization



Types of services provided

Respondents were asked to indicate what types of services their organization provides. More than three-quarters of the organizations provide employment supports and job skills (80%). Forty-five percent of organizations provide youth transition supports and about the same percentage offer behavioral or mental health services (44%). Forty-two percent of providers offer education/awareness programs and 41 percent provide transportation services. More than one-third (36%) of the organizations provide housing support and 38 percent offer home care or day care. Less than a quarter of the organizations provide health care (19%) or addiction services for drugs or alcohol (16%), assistive technology acquisition or support (16%), and legal or advocacy services (13%). Two percent of the organizations provide services that fall under the category of “other” and include evaluation and disability services (Figure 6)

.Figure 6. What are the types of services your organization provides?\*

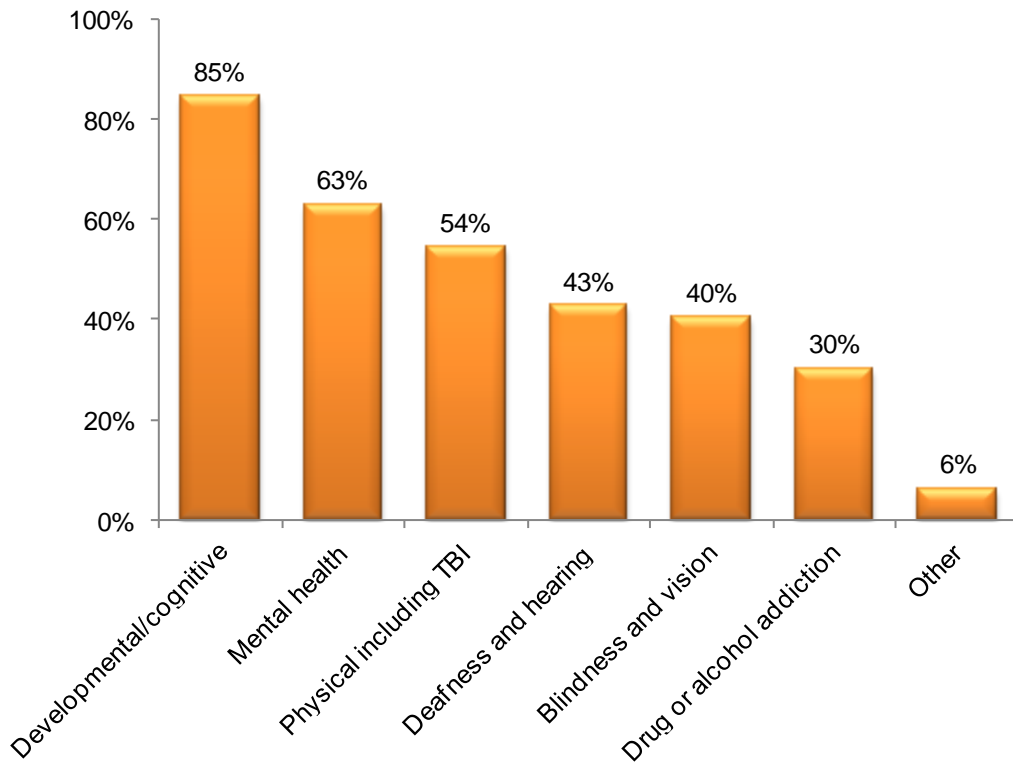


\*Categories are not mutually exclusive

### Types of disabilities served by organizations

Eighty-five percent of respondents reported serving people with developmental and cognitive disabilities. More than half serve individuals with mental health disabilities (63%) and physical disabilities including traumatic brain injury (TBI) (54%). Less than half of providers serve people with hearing and deafness disabilities (43%) and blindness and vision disabilities (40%), and less than one-third serve people with drug or alcohol addiction. Six percent of providers serve individuals with “other” disabilities, which include dually diagnosed individuals and ex-offenders (Figure 7).

Figure 7. What are the types of disabilities that you serve?\*



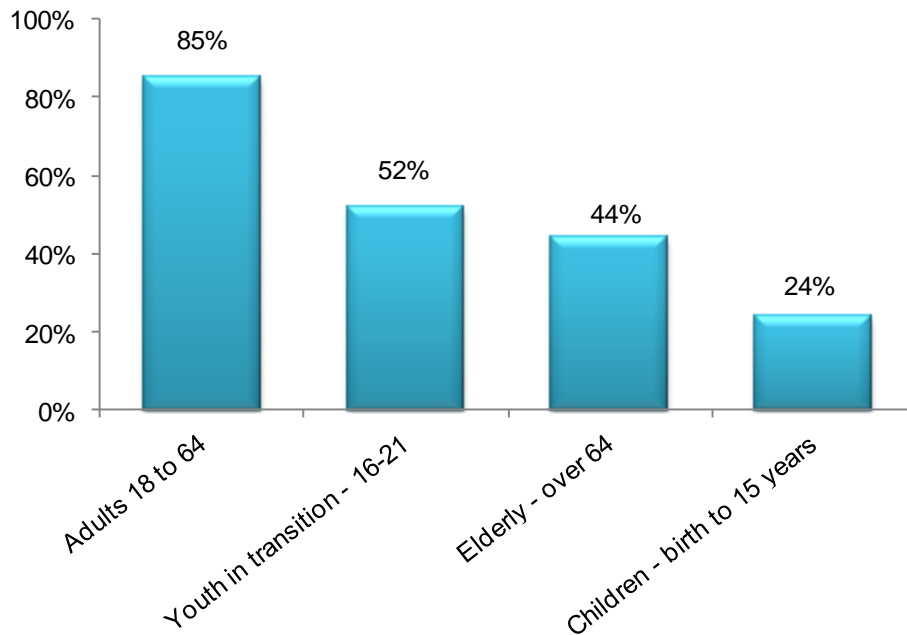
\*Categories are not mutually exclusive

### Organizational experiences

#### Age grouping of target population

Respondents were asked to define the target population they serve by age. Eighty-five percent serve adults ages 18 to 64, and more than half (52%) target youth in transition or those who are ages 16 to 21. Under half of providers (44%) serve adults over age 64, and nearly one-quarter (24%) target children from birth to 15 years as the populations they serve (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Who is/are your target population(s) defined by age that you serve?\*



\*Categories are not mutually exclusive

### Challenges and barriers

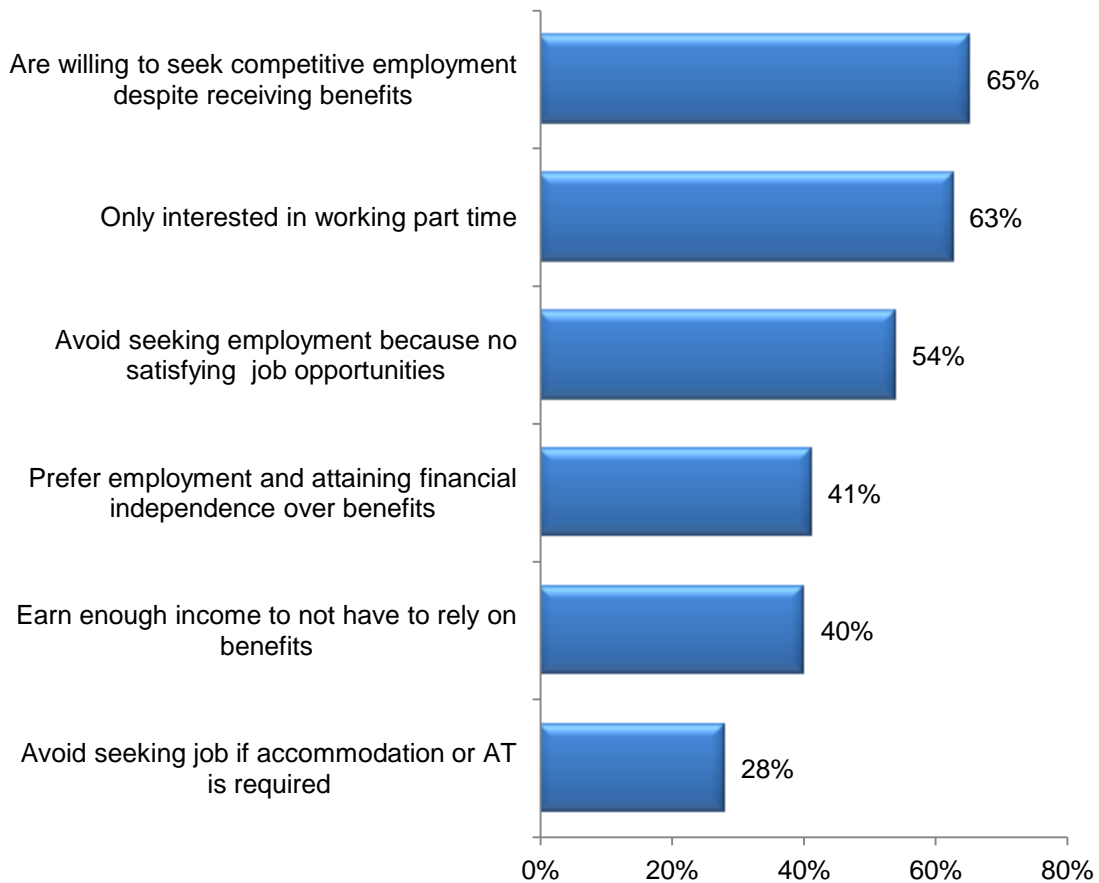
Based on their organization's experiences over the past year, respondents were asked to provide feedback regarding challenges and barriers for the people they serve.

Nearly two-thirds of providers (65%) strongly or somewhat agree that people who receive benefits due to a disability are usually willing to seek competitive employment; however 63 percent indicate that people with disabilities are usually only interested in part time work. More than half of providers (54%) strongly or somewhat agree that the individuals they serve avoid seeking employment because of a lack of satisfying job opportunities, and slightly more than one-quarter (28%) agree that the people they serve avoid seeking employment if job accommodations or assistive technologies are needed.

More than half of providers (58%) somewhat or strongly disagree that people with disabilities are more interested in attaining financial independence through competitive employment than keeping their benefits, and about the same percent (60%) also disagree with the statement that most people have the potential to earn enough income to avoid relying on SSI/SSDI benefits, given existing resources (Figure 9). The full results are shown in Appendix C.



Figure 9. Challenges and barriers (strongly or somewhat agree)



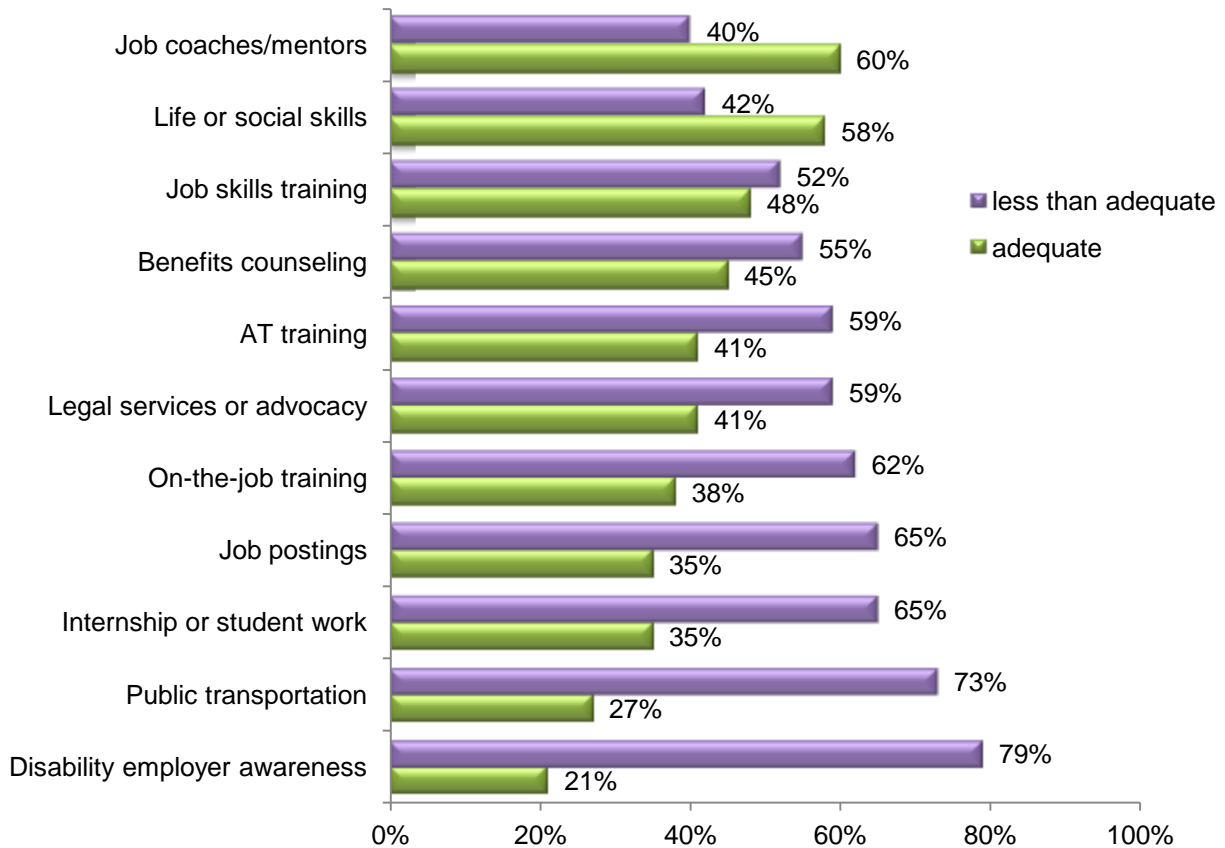
Adequacy of services and programs

Based on their organization’s experiences over the past year, respondents were asked to indicate the adequacy of services and programs that support recruiting, hiring, and promotion of the people they serve. “Adequate” services and programs were defined as having a sufficient number of services available and accessible for the people they serve.

More than three-quarters of the providers (79%) believe disability employer awareness programs are less than adequate and nearly three-quarters (73%) indicate that public transportation is less than adequate. More than half of the providers reported the following services to be less than adequate: internship or student work (65%), job postings (65%), on-the-job training (62%), legal services or advocacy (59%), AT training (59%), benefits counseling (55%), and job skills training (52%).

Over half of respondents indicated that life skills or social skills development training and job coaches/mentors programs were adequate and useful to the people they serve (58% and 60%, respectively) (Figure 10). The full results are shown in Appendix D.

Figure 10. Adequacy of each type of service or program

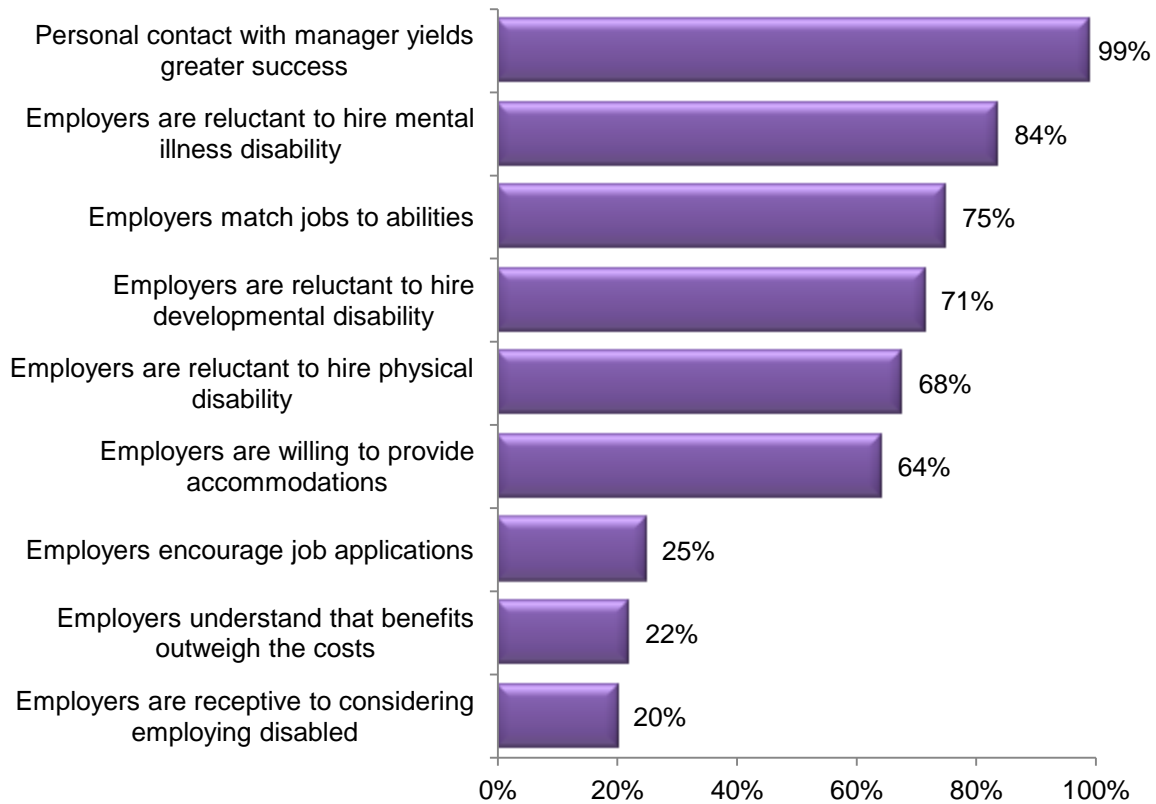


### Challenges for employers

During the past four years, efforts have been made in the state to reduce or eliminate barriers for employers to hire people with disabilities. Based on their organization’s experiences over the past year, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with statements regarding challenges with employers to hiring people with disabilities.

An overwhelming number of respondents (99%) strongly or somewhat agree that an organization’s personal contact with a manager as an employer is more likely to successfully place a client. Over three-quarters of respondents (84%) agree with the statement that employers are reluctant to hire someone who they know has a mental illness disability, and 75 percent agree that employers willing to hire people with disabilities adequately match jobs to abilities and therefore provide satisfying work. Slightly lower percentages of respondents agree that employers are willing to provide accommodation for employees (64%), and are reluctant to hire employees with a developmental disability (71%) or a physical disability (68%). Conversely, 80 percent of respondents disagree with the statement that employers are receptive to considering employing people with disabilities, and 78 percent disagree that employers understand that the benefits outweigh the costs of hiring an employee with a disability. In addition, 75 percent disagree with the statement that employers actively encourage job applications from people with disabilities (Figure 11). The full results are shown in Appendix E.

Figure 11. Challenges with employers to hiring people with disabilities (strongly or somewhat agree)



Challenges for students with disabilities

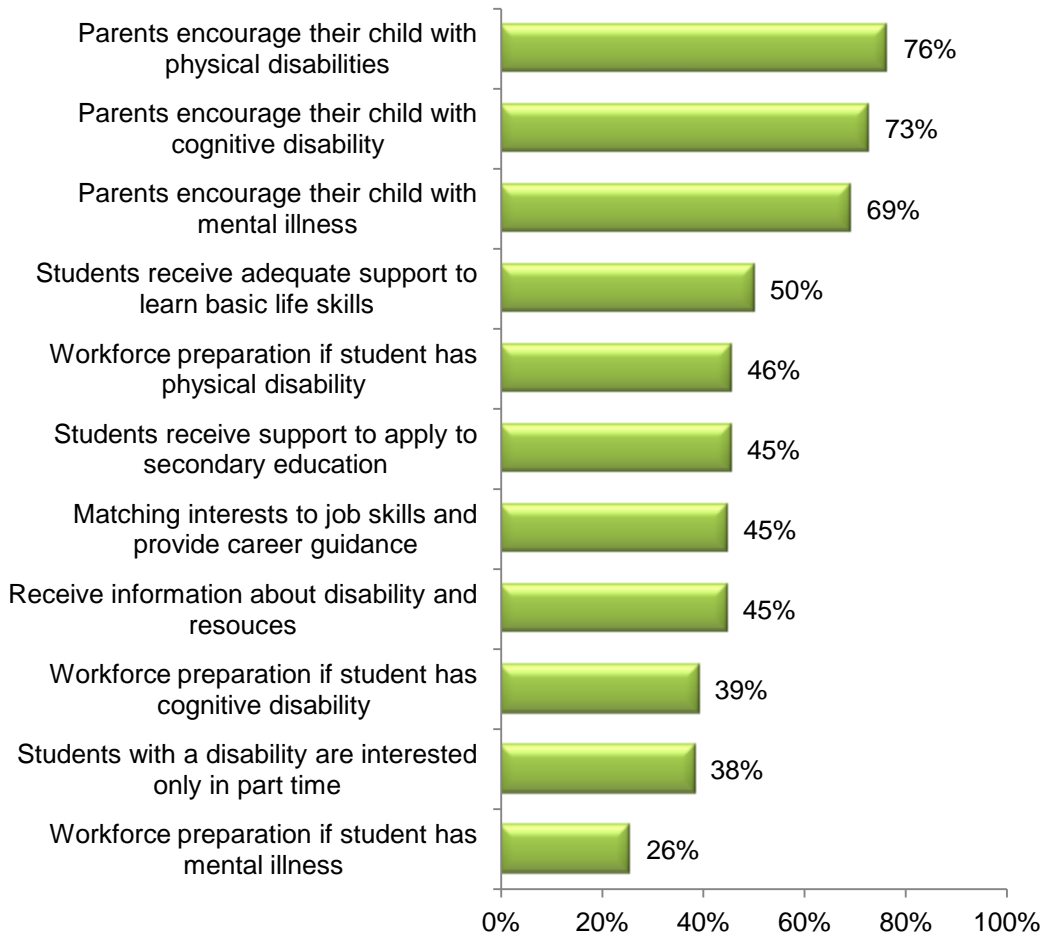
Based on their organization’s experiences over the past year, respondents indicated whether they strongly or somewhat agree or somewhat or strongly disagree with several statements regarding challenges or barriers for students with disabilities to prepare for and seek employment. Respondents strongly or somewhat agree that parents encourage their children to do job skills training and seek job opportunities if their child has a physical disability (76%), a developmental or cognitive disability (73%), or a mental illness or addiction (69%).

Providers are conflicted (50% agree and 50% disagree) regarding whether or not students with a disability receive adequate support to learn about basic life skills, including budgeting, paying bills, shopping, and finding transportation. Fifty-five percent of respondents disagree with the statement that students with a disability and their families receive sufficient information about their disability and the resources and support available, and 55 percent disagree with the idea that the education system has done a good job matching interests and strengths of students with disabilities to develop job skills and provide career path guidance. More than half of respondents (55%) also do not agree that students receive adequate support in the educational system to apply for and enter secondary education programs.

Sixty-two percent of providers disagree students are usually interested only in part time work. Respondents do not agree that the education system provides adequate support to prepare

students to enter the workforce upon graduation or exiting high school if a student has a physical disability (55%), a mental illness or addiction (75%), or a developmental or cognitive disability (61%) (Figure 12). The full results are shown in Appendix F.

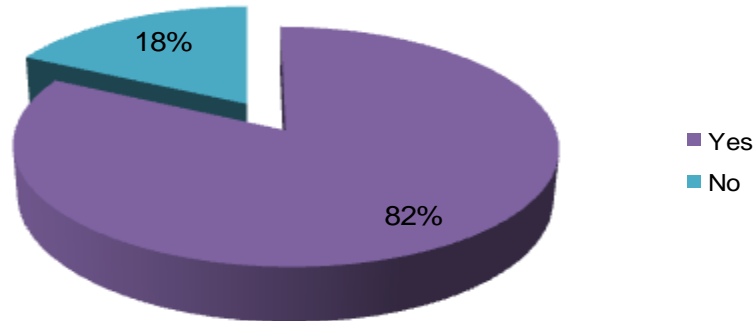
Figure 12. Challenges for students with disabilities (strongly or somewhat agree)



### Connect-Ability

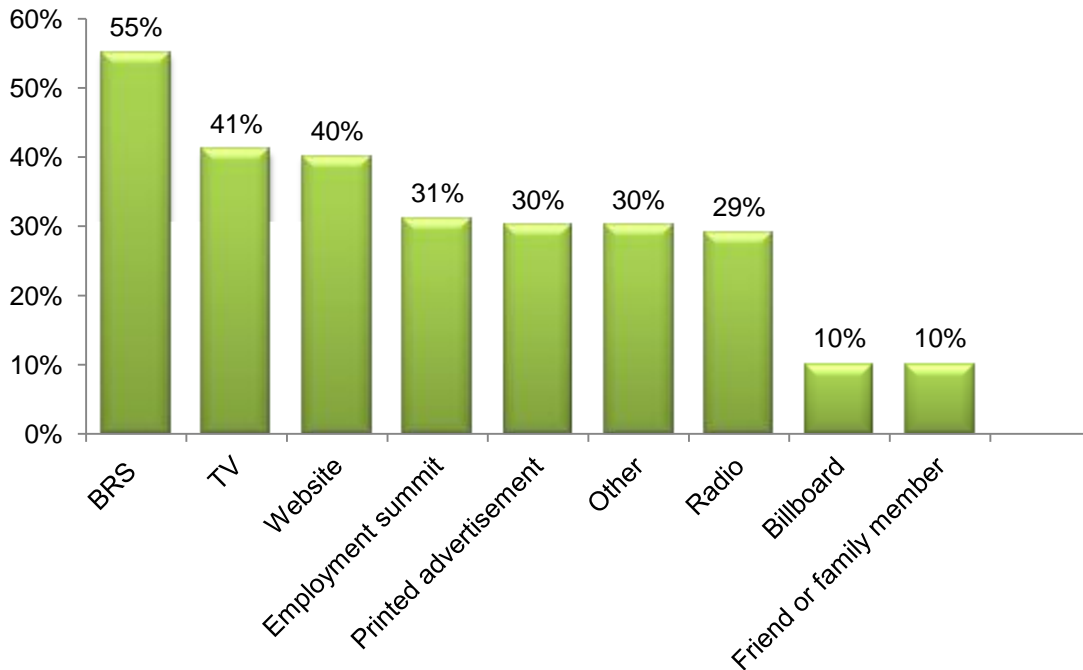
The majority of respondents (82%) had heard of Connect-Ability, while the remaining 18 percent had not (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Have you heard of Connect-Ability?



Of the 82 percent of respondents who had heard of Connect-Ability more than half (55%) heard about it through BRS. Forty-one percent heard about the program through TV and 40 percent heard about it through the website. Less than one-third learned about Connect-Ability through the Employment Summit (31%), printed advertisements (30%), and radio (29%), and fewer heard about it through billboards (10%) or a friend or family member (10%). Nearly one-third learned about Connect-Ability from other sources including the Department of Developmental Services Leadership Forums, professional colleagues, Aging and Disability Resource Centers, Regional Workforce Investment meetings, and Youth Transition meetings (Figure 14).

Figure 14. How did you hear of Connect-Ability?\*



\*Categories are not mutually exclusive

## V. Conclusions

This study contributes to our understanding of the persistent low employment rate of people with disabilities by exploring employment practices and issues experienced by service providers across Connecticut related to employing people with disabilities. It also confirms previous state and national research on the continuing mixed attitudes and outcomes regarding the employment of people with disabilities. It should be noted that because only one person from each organization responded to the survey, knowledge of company policy or practices related to people with disabilities may not be complete. In addition, their opinions may or may not reflect organization policy.

Providers in this study were asked to provide demographic information, organizational characteristics (i.e., legal status of organization, types of services and disabilities served) and organizational experiences (i.e., age groups of target populations, challenges and barriers, adequacy of services and programs). An additional question asked providers about their familiarity with Connect-Ability.

Provider demographics indicate that two-thirds of respondents (66%) were either ages 51 to 60 or 41 to 50, more than half (66%) were female, and 91 percent were White or Caucasian. There was a broad distribution of response by zip code with a greater percentage of responses noted in Norwich, Middletown, and Torrington. Two-thirds of providers in this study were either a supervisor or manager (35%) or a senior executive (31%) in their organization with most organizations (73%) being categorized as not for profit. The top three services provided were employment supports and job skills (80%), youth transition support (45%), and mental health services (44%). Most providers (85%) serve people with developmental/cognitive disabilities and more than half serve people with mental health (63%) or physical disabilities (54%). Adults age 18 to 64 are the largest target population (85%) followed by youth in transition (52%).

Some of the challenges and barriers mentioned by providers in this survey include that people with disabilities usually are only interested in part time work and avoid seeking employment due to a paucity of satisfying job opportunities. Providers disagree that people with disabilities are more interested in securing competitive employment and in becoming financially independent than keeping their benefits and that they have the potential to earn enough income to avoid relying on benefits. Other challenges involve the inadequacy of services and programs. More than three-quarters of providers agree there needs to be better disability awareness programs, and more than half agree public transportation, internship or student work, job postings, and on-the-job training need to be improved. Providers indicate the importance of personal contact with an employer in successfully securing employment for a client and the difficulty of working with employers who are reluctant to consider a person they know has a mental illness disability. While more than half of providers agree employers are willing to provide accommodation for employees, they remain reluctant to hire people with certain disabilities (i.e., mental illness disability). Other research (Dewson, Ritchie, & Meager, 2005; Hernandez, Keyes, & Balcazar, 2000; Lyth, 1973) supports this observation: many employers report they are willing to provide accommodations, but demonstrate conflicted attitudes about hiring people with certain disabilities. Programs to raise disability awareness and increased efforts to initiate and maintain personal contact with managers who oversee hiring would potentially lead to greater success in achieving higher rates of employment for people with disabilities.

While providers agree that parents encourage their children who have disabilities to do job skills training and to seek employment, they are conflicted regarding the adequacy of support they receive to learn basic life skills, and more than half disagree that sufficient resources and

support are available. In the educational system, future efforts should focus on helping students match interests and strengths to develop job skills and to provide career path guidance.

The majority of providers (82%) have heard about Connect-Ability. While more than half became familiar with it through BRS and more than one-quarter from the TV or website, it is encouraging that nearly one-third learned of Connect-Ability from collaboration with colleagues. This demonstrates that word about Connect-Ability as an important resource is spreading among providers as they collaborate with one another.

While the methodology for surveying providers in 2006 was different from 2011, there are some comparisons that can be noted regarding the progress that has been made in the employment of people with disabilities. In the 2006 focus groups with providers, it was pointed out that lack of information about available employment resources can make it difficult for people with disabilities to access the assistance they need to obtain and maintain employment. Providers also suggested the importance of increasing coordination and communication among agencies to strengthen support systems and networks and the need to have one source for all information and a sense of connection with one advocate. The 2011 provider survey results demonstrate some significant changes that have occurred over the past four years. For example, Connect-Ability has successfully achieved some brand recognition with 82 percent of providers reporting familiarity with it. Connect-Ability has also brought about systemic change and progress in furthering the employment of people with disabilities in numerous ways including the development of a Technical Assistance Center (TAC). The TAC has become Connecticut's primary source and a single point of entry to inform employers, employees, service providers and job seekers about employment issues and people with disabilities. The marketing campaign launched in 2007 has also created a greater awareness about the ability of people with disabilities in the workplace and the value of building relationships between different agencies and organizations to further the employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

On the negative side, some of the challenges and barriers that providers identified in 2006 continue to be problematic in 2011 including a lack of meaningful job opportunities for people with disabilities, concerns about accommodations and benefits, and the inadequacy of certain services and programs. As in 2006, providers are still concerned about employers' lack of awareness and knowledge about people with disabilities and their reluctance to hire them. They also continue to report challenges in assisting people with mental illness who face barriers that are different from people with other disabilities, such as the presence of psychiatric symptoms and deficits in interpersonal relationships (Baron & Salzer, 2002; Corbière, Mercier, & Lesage, 2004). For youth with disabilities, providers continue to underscore the need for improved transitional services including the school's greater role in educating parents and students and the necessity to help students develop life skills in addition to workforce preparation. As noted in the literature, lack of school-age programming and transitional planning and services are barriers that, if provided, would help youth to transition more productively from high school to the workforce (Gerber, Ginsberg, & Reif, 1992).

Connect-Ability should use the results of this report and its expanding name recognition to focus future efforts on the gaps providers identified. It should also consider allocating resources

towards the programs providers identified as challenges for both employers and students with disabilities. This will help minimize employment barriers and ensure a productive and accessible infrastructure.



## VI. References

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## **VIII. Appendices**

Appendix A: Service Provider Survey

Appendix B: Invitation letter to provider – template

Appendix C: Challenges and barriers for people served

Appendix D: Adequacy of services and programs

Appendix E: Challenges for employers

Appendix F: Challenges for students with disabilities

## Appendix A: Service Provider Survey

1. Which of the following best describes your job title and/or primary role? [check only one]

- Vocational rehabilitation counselor
- Transitional counselor / coordinator
- Community Work Incentive Coordinator / benefits options counselor
- Physical therapist
- Job developer / outreach coordinator
- Supervisor or manager (excluding Human Resources)
- Human resources
- Senior executive (i.e. CEO / President / Executive Director / CFO / VP),  
(excluding business owner)
- Business owner
- Consultant / advisor / professor
- Other, specify: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your organization's 5 digit zip code? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is the legal status of your organization? [check only one]

- For profit
- Not for profit
- Government agency

4. What are the types of services your organization provides? [check all that apply]

- Employment support or job coaches or skills development
- Youth transition support services
- Education and awareness programs
- Transportation services
- Housing support
- Behavioral or mental health services
- Addiction services (drug or alcohol)
- Health care services
- Home care support services or day care services or respite
- Assistive technology acquisition or support
- Legal services or advocacy support
- Other, specify: \_\_\_\_\_

5. What are the types of disabilities that you serve? [check all that apply]

- Blindness or low vision
- Deafness or hearing impaired
- Physical disabling conditions or traumatic brain injury
- Mental health
- Drug or alcohol addictions
- Developmental and intellectual or cognitive disabilities (including mental retardation,  
learning disabilities, Autism)
- Other, specify: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Who is/are your target population(s) defined by age that you serve? [check all that apply]
- Non-elderly adults ages 18 to 64 years
  - Elderly adults over 64 years
  - Children ages birth to 15 years
  - Youth in transition ages 16 to 21 years

7. During the past 4 years efforts have been made in the state to reduce or eliminate barriers to employment and to encourage people with disabilities to seek employment.

Based on your organization's experiences over the past year, please provide feedback regarding challenges and barriers for the people you serve.

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement below by checking one of the following: strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. [check one box for each statement]

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
(a) People who receive benefits due to a disability are usually willing to seek competitive employment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) People with disabilities are usually interested only in part time work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) People with disabilities are more interested in attaining financial independence through competitive employment than keeping their benefits.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Most people with disabilities have the potential to earn enough income to not rely on SSI/SSDI benefits, given the existing resources.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e) People with disabilities avoid seeking employment if job accommodations or assistive technologies are needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(f) People with disabilities avoid seeking employment because of a lack of satisfying job opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Based on your organization’s experiences over the past year, describe the adequacy of **services and programs** to support recruiting, hiring and promotion of people you serve. Please indicate your assessment of the adequacy of each type of service or program below by checking one of the following: adequate, less than adequate, or not applicable. [check one box for each statement]

Define “adequate” services and programs as a sufficient number are available and accessible for the people you serve.

	Adequate	Less than Adequate	Not Applicable
Job coaches or mentors or job developers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job skills development training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
On-the-job training programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internship program or student summer or after-school work programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disability employer awareness programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Benefits counseling or information about benefits options	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobs posting or available list of employers to approach for satisfying or challenging employment opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Life skills or social skills development training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assistive technology training and support programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public transportation or para-transit transportation services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal services or advocacy support services related to employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Answer # 9 Only If Question 4 Checked - “Employment Support or job coaches or skills development”**

9. During the past 4 years efforts have been made in the state to reduce or eliminate barriers for employers to hire people with disabilities.

Based on your organization’s experiences over the past year, please provide feedback regarding challenges with employers to hiring people with disabilities.

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement below by checking one of the following: strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. [check one box for each statement]

	<b><u>Strongly Agree</u></b>	<b><u>Somewhat Agree</u></b>	<b><u>Somewhat Disagree</u></b>	<b><u>Strongly Disagree</u></b>
(a) Employers from all industries have done a good job of actively encouraging job applications from people with disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Employers from all industries are receptive to considering employing people with disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Employers are generally reluctant to hire someone who they know has a:				
(i) physical disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii) mental illness or addiction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iii) developmental or cognitive disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Employers understand that the benefits outweigh the costs of hiring an employee with a disability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e) Employers are willing to provide accommodations for employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(f) Employers willing to hire people with disabilities have done a good job of matching jobs to abilities and providing satisfying work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(g) If my organization has a personal contact with a manager at an employer then I am more likely to successfully place a client.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Answer # 10 Only If Question 4 Checked - “Youth in Transition Support Services”**

10. During the past 4 years efforts have been made in the state to reduce or eliminate barriers to employment and to improve transition services for student with disabilities. Based on your organization’s experiences over the past year, please provide feedback regarding challenges and barriers for student with disabilities to prepare for and seek employment.

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement below by checking one of the following: strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. [check one box for each statement]

	<b><u>Strongly Agree</u></b>	<b><u>Somewhat Agree</u></b>	<b><u>Somewhat Disagree</u></b>	<b><u>Strongly Disagree</u></b>
(a) The K-12 educational system provides adequate support to prepare students to enter the workforce upon graduation or exiting high school (i.e. job skills, interviewing, workplace behavior) if a student has a: (i) physical disability (ii) mental illness or addiction (iii) developmental or cognitive disability	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
(b) The K-12 educational system has done a good job of matching interests and strengths of students with disabilities to develop job skills and provide career path guidance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Students with a disability receive adequate support in the K-12 educational system to learn about basic life skills (i.e. budgeting, paying bills, finding transportation, shopping).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Students with a disability receive adequate support in K-12 educational system to apply for and enter secondary education programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e) Students with a disability are usually interested only in part time work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(f) Parents encourage their children to do job skills training and seek job opportunities, if their child has a: (i) physical disability (ii) mental illness or addiction (iii) developmental or cognitive disability	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
(g) Students with a disability and their families receive sufficient information about their disability, and the resources and supports available through the school and community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. Have you heard of Connect-Ability?

- No
- Yes

How did you hear of it? [check all that apply]

- TV
- Radio
- Printed advertisement
- Billboard
- Website
- Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
- Invitation to Employment Summit
- Friend or family member
- Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

12. What is your age? [check only one]

- Less than 21 years
- 21 to 30 years
- 31 to 40 years
- 41 to 50 years
- 51 to 60 years
- 60 to 65 years
- Over 65 years

13. What is your gender? [check only one]

- Male
- Female

14. What is your ethnic group? [check only one]

- Hispanic or Latino
- White or Caucasian (not Hispanic or Latino)
- Black or African American (not Hispanic or Latino)
- Asian
- American Indian / Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islands
- 2 or more races specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other, specify: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix B: Invitation letter to provider – template



[ContactName]  
[ProviderAgencyName]  
[StreetAddress]  
[Town], [State] [ZIP]

[Date]

**RE: Invitation to Participate in a Survey Related to Experiences with Employment Services for People with Disabilities**

Dear [Provider Agency Name]:

The UConn Health Center, under the direction of Julie Robison, PhD, is conducting a short survey that involves input from community-based service providers across the state. The purpose of the statewide survey is to identify the experiences of providers related to employment services and supports for people with disabilities and older workers.

This survey is part of the evaluation of a federally funded Medicaid Infrastructure Grant which was awarded to the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services within the CT Department of Social Services. In Connecticut this grant program is called "**Connect-Ability**".

You are invited to voluntarily provide your input about your organization's needs, experiences and suggestions. The survey responses will be **completely anonymous** and your name and organization's identity will not be collected. Your responses will be summarized along with other providers' responses across the state. The survey will take you **about 10 minutes** to complete on-line.

Simply click on your agency's individualized access code and link below or type in the website address including the access code into your web-browser to open the survey. Your actual responses submitted on-line will not be linked to your access code and will remain anonymous.

[www.uconnsurveys.com/ProviderSurvey/survey.aspx?id=####](http://www.uconnsurveys.com/ProviderSurvey/survey.aspx?id=####)

Please try to complete this short survey within the next two weeks. You will have the opportunity to voluntarily submit your email into a separate database to be eligible for one of ten **\$50 gift cards**.

If you would prefer to receive a paper copy of this survey or if you have any questions you may contact us confidentially at the toll free number: 1-877-773-6158 or email to: Admin.UConnSurveys@uchc.edu. All paper copies of surveys will be kept strictly confidential.

Thank you for your help with this initiative to better understand the needs of Connecticut service providers and the clients you serve. In return, your provider organization will be able to receive results from the survey responses overall in Connecticut.

Your input will help to further shape policy and programs supporting the employment of people with disabilities and older workers in our state. Your time and input are very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie T. Robison, PhD".

Julie Robison, PhD  
Associate Professor

### Appendix C: Challenges and barriers for people served

	<b><u>Strongly Agree</u></b>	<b><u>Somewhat Agree</u></b>	<b><u>Somewhat Disagree</u></b>	<b><u>Strongly Disagree</u></b>
(a) People who receive benefits due to a disability are usually willing to seek competitive employment.	17.3% (22)	48.0% (61)	33.1% (42)	1.6% (2)
(b) People with disabilities are usually interested only in part time work.	23.0% (29)	39.7% (50)	27.8% (35)	9.5% (12)
(c) People with disabilities are more interested in attaining financial independence through competitive employment than keeping their benefits.	3.2% (4)	38.9% (49)	49.2% (8.7)	8.7% (11)
(d) Most people with disabilities have the potential to earn enough income to not rely on SSI/SSDI benefits, given the existing resources.	9.4% (12)	30.7% (39)	37.0% (47)	22.8% (29)
(e) People with disabilities avoid seeking employment if job accommodations or assistive technologies are needed.	3.2% (4)	24.8% (31)	52.8% (66)	19.2% (24)
(f) People with disabilities avoid seeking employment because of a lack of satisfying job opportunities	11.9% 15	42.1% (53)	34.1% (43)	11.9% (15)

### Appendix D: Adequacy of services and programs

	Adequate	Less than Adequate	Not Applicable
Job coaches or mentors or job developers	54.3% (69)	36.2% (46)	9.4% (12)
Job skills development training	42.9% (54)	46.8% (59)	10.3% (13)
On-the-job training programs	32.8% (41)	52.8% (66)	14.4% (18)
Internship program or student summer or after-school work programs	26.0% (33)	48.0% (61)	26.0% (33)
Disability employer awareness programs	18.3% (23)	67.2% (84)	14.4% (18)
Benefits counseling or information about benefits options	37.9% (47)	46.0% (57)	16.1% (20)
Jobs posting or available list of employers to approach for satisfying or challenging employment opportunities	30.7% (39)	58.3% (74)	11.0% (14)
Life skills or social skills development training	54.3% (69)	38.6% (49)	7.1% (9)
Assistive technology training and support programs	32.5% (41)	47.6% (60)	19.8% (25)
Public transportation or para-transit transportation services	23.2% (29)	64.0% (80)	12.8% (16)
Legal services or advocacy support services related to employment	31.0% (39)	45.2% (57)	23.8% (30)

## Appendix E: Challenges for employers

	<b><u>Strongly Agree</u></b>	<b><u>Somewhat Agree</u></b>	<b><u>Somewhat Disagree</u></b>	<b><u>Strongly Disagree</u></b>
(a) Employers from all industries have done a good job of actively encouraging job applications from people with disabilities	0% (0)	24.8% (25)	40.6% (41)	34.7% (35)
(b) Employers from all industries are receptive to considering employing people with disabilities	1.0% (1)	19.0% (19)	57.0% (57)	23.0% (23)
(c) Employers are generally reluctant to hire someone who they know has a:				
(i) physical disability	15.2% (15)	52.5% (52)	25.3% (25)	7.1% (7)
(ii) mental illness or addiction	40.8% (40)	42.9% (42)	11.2% (11)	5.1% (5)
(iii) developmental or cognitive disability	21.4% (21)	50.0% (49)	22.4% (22)	6.1% (6)
(d) Employers understand that the benefits outweigh the costs of hiring an employee with a disability.	0% (0)	22.0% (22)	53.0% (53)	25.0% (25)
(e) Employers are willing to provide accommodations for employees	7.1% (7)	57.1% (56)	27.6% (27)	8.2% (8)
(f) Employers willing to hire people with disabilities have done a good job of matching jobs to abilities and providing satisfying work.	9.0% (9)	66.0% (66)	19.0% (19)	6.0% (6)
(g) If my organization has a personal contact with a manager at an employer then I am more likely to successfully place a client.	73.0% (73)	26.0% (26)	1% (1)	0% (0)

## Appendix F: Challenges for students with disabilities

	<b><u>Strongly Agree</u></b>	<b><u>Somewhat Agree</u></b>	<b><u>Somewhat Disagree</u></b>	<b><u>Strongly Disagree</u></b>
(a) The K-12 educational system provides adequate support to prepare students to enter the workforce upon graduation or exiting high school (i.e. job skills, interviewing, workplace behavior) if a student has a:				
(i) physical disability	7.3% (4)	38.2% (21)	43.6% (24)	10.9% (6)
(ii) mental illness or addiction	7.3% (4)	18.2% (10)	45.5% (25)	29.1% (16)
(iii) developmental or cognitive disability	8.9% (5)	30.4% (17)	42.9% (24)	17.9% (10)
(b) The K-12 educational system has done a good job of matching interests and strengths of students with disabilities to develop job skills and provide career path guidance.	5.4% (3)	39.3% (22)	35.7% (20)	19.6% (11)
(c) Students with a disability receive adequate support in the K-12 educational system to learn about basic life skills (i.e. budgeting, paying bills, finding transportation, shopping).	5.4% (3)	44.6% (25)	28.6% (16)	21.4% (12)
(d) Students with a disability receive adequate support in K-12 educational system to apply for and enter secondary education programs.	10.9% (6)	34.5% (19)	36.4% (20)	18.2% (10)
(e) Students with a disability are usually interested only in part time work.	7.3% (4)	30.9% (17)	41.8% (23)	20.0% (11)
(f) Parents encourage their children to do job skills training and seek job opportunities, if their child has a:				
(i) physical disability	9.1% (5)	67.3% (37)	21.8% (12)	1.8% (1)
(ii) mental illness or addiction	5.5% (3)	63.6% (35)	27.3% (15)	3.6% (2)
(iii) developmental or cognitive disability	9.1% (5)	63.6% (35)	25.5% (14)	1.8% (1)

(g) Students with a disability and their families receive sufficient information about their disability, and the resources and supports available through the school and community.	8.9% (5)	35.7% (20)	32.1% (18)	23.2% (13)
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