



TRANSCRIPT

Virtual Series: Disability Employment – Looking Back & Moving Forward

Event 3 of 4: RRTC Disability Inclusive Employment Policy Center

October 21, 2020 from 1:00 – 2:30 pm [Eastern Time]

>> **Barry Whaley:** Hi, everybody, welcome, we're glad you're with us today. As Marsha said, I'm Barry Whaley. I'm the Director of the Southeast ADA Center. It's a project of the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University.

Thank you again for joining us. This is our third of four virtual events. Today we are going to be discussing the newly funded RRTC Disability Inclusive Employment Policy Center at the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University.

Increasing access and opportunity is the October 2020 theme for the annual National Disability Employment Awareness Month, or NDEAM. This is the 75th year we celebrate led by the U.S. Department of Labor. During 2020 we also are celebrating the 30th anniversary of the ADA, the Americans with Disabilities Act. It's also the 100th anniversary of vocational rehabilitation.

So, in recognition of these important milestones, the Southeast ADA Center is hosting this four-part Virtual Series: Disability Employment, Looking Back and Moving Forward, on each Wednesday in October, starting at 1:00 pm [Eastern Time].

For this webinar I'd like to introduce our guests. They are researchers with the newly funded RRTC Disability Inclusive Employment Policy Center.

- Michael Morris, Senior Advisor for the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University.
- As well as Meera Adya, Senior Director of Research and Evaluation at BBI.
- We also have joining us Nicole Maestas, Associate Professor of Health Care Policy at Harvard Medical School, and Research Associate of the National Bureau of Economic Research.

- Doug Kruse is also with us today, Distinguished Professor in the School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers University.
- Elaine Zundl, Research Director for the Center for Women and Work at Rutgers.
- Lisa Schur, Director of Program for Disability Research at Rutgers University.
- And our host for the webinar today of course is Peter Blanck, University Professor, Chairman of the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University.

So, Peter, I'm going to hand it off to you.

>> **Peter Blanck:** Thank you, Barry, for that great introduction, and Marsha. It really is a pleasure and an honor to work with this group. Many of whom I've known over the years, new folks as well, like Nicole at Harvard. And it's an honor to have the confidence of the National Institute for Independent Living and Learning Research to undertake this new center on Disability Inclusive Employment Policy Rehabilitation Research at this particularly challenging time during a global health, economic, and social emergency, which is drastically changing the way in which we think about work, the way in which we conduct work, the

way in which people will be included in work and in all aspects of the workforce.

So as typical for me with great minds and researchers involved in this project up and down the line, my job is to step aside, let those folks shine and to try to help steer the boat in a modest way so that we can move towards a world which we all want that will be more inclusive, more equitable, more fair and just, not only for people with disabilities in all forms, but for all of us with multiple minority or intersectional identities across race, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity and age and others, so that we all may be included to the maximum extent possible to participate in this experiment called the American democracy that we are all engaged in.

So, Barry, those are my opening remarks, I guess I will stick with them for now, and I'm delighted to follow your lead in terms of who will speak next.

>> **Barry Whaley:** Great, Peter. Well, I think we're going to turn it over to Michael, I believe?

>> **Michael Morris:** Let me unmute myself. Yes, thanks, Barry. If we can go to the next slide, please.

As Peter said, this newly funded center is from the National Institute of Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research and as they always require the views you hear today do not necessarily reflect the official policies of that federal agency, nor imply endorsement by the federal government.

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So, when you think about this center, NIDILRR has been funding an Employment Policy Research Center, I believe now going back almost 20 years. But this one and this new team as Peter mentioned with a core group of researchers at Syracuse University, Harvard, and Rutgers, and you'll hear about many other collaborators as well, it comes at such a unique time. At the time the proposal was being written, we were already in the midst of COVID-19 and the unprecedented health, social, and economic challenges that all Americans are facing, but certainly some unique and overwhelming challenges for youth and working age adults across the spectrum of disabilities.

So because of that, this particular center in our preparing the proposal took the approach that we needed to go back pre-COVID as well as understand what was going on in the present day, but also recognize that COVID-19 will someday be something of the past and that we need to look prospectively as well through a series of research studies to

understand how can we increase employment and economic security for people with disabilities nationwide across market sectors.

As you will hear from some members of the research team, this requires both basic and applied study and different research methods, and the work very much will be driven by a core set of researchers with active engagement by the disability community.

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The Center has five years of funding, it began just over a month ago, on September 1st, and will go to August 31st, 2025. So, we'll be at some point post-COVID and it's a really unique time as I just mentioned for the Center to conduct scientifically rigorous set of randomized control trial and quasi experimental studies across the employment life cycle. We broke down the body of work into three core areas: enhancing employment reengagement; enhancing employment; and enhancing job quality and retention.

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As already has been discussed, there are these partnerships among the researchers, Syracuse, Harvard, and Rutgers. You have heard introductions by Barry of some of the key members. So, let's go to the next slide, please.

You should also know in preparing this application, it wasn't just the researchers from the three universities, it also involved active engagement of: ten major organizations with extensive reach to target audiences of which really are quite diverse employers; people with disabilities; rehabilitation professionals; workforce development professionals; the private sector in multiple ways.

So, if we go to the next slide, you'll get a little bit more sense of this.

Here is the list of ten. Many of these groups I think will be very recognizable to you, our audience, across the country.

1. Disability:IN, probably the premier organization working with employers, large and other size employers across market sectors nationwide.
2. We are also working with the National Governor's Association, Center for Best Practices, who will enable us to reach state policy leaders, governors' office staff and their policy experts.
3. It also includes the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, CSAVR, which is the trade association for state VR agencies across the country.

4. Fourth group is AAPD, the American Association of People with Disabilities, which will help us reach people across the spectrum of disabilities and allies across the country.
5. Group 5 is ILRU, led by Lex Frieden, Independent Living Research Utilization, which has extensive reach through the hundreds of independent living centers, the directors and their staff across the country.
6. Next, the National Disability Institute, which has extensive reach with both banks and community nonprofits across the country. Many organizations in and outside the disability community are working on finding pathways out of poverty to greater economic stability for people with disabilities.
7. Number 7 is the ABLE National Resource Center. Hopefully many you are familiar with ABLE, the Achieving Better Life Experience Law, which created ABLE accounts of which there are some other 75,000 accounts that have now been opened across the country. So, the ABLE NRC will help us reach that audience.
8. The Center on Women and Work, which is at Rutgers, will help us also reach out to a specific audience of women and families.

9. Number 9, APSE, the Association to Promote Supported Employment, employment service providers across the country,
10. And Number 10, the ADA National Knowledge Translation Center. The Southeast ADA Center sponsoring this webinar today is one of ten, the other nine are scattered in regions covering the full country. And will also enable us to reach thousands and thousands of people.

What is so important about knowledge translation is this center is about really doing cutting edge research, but it's making sure that research gets utilized. That it impacts policy and programs and practices.

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So, we want to take you to the understanding of exactly what were the key studies that we contemplated and have now been designed and are part of this new center that will play out over the next five years.

And so, what you see on the screen is a list of the first four, projects 1 through 4, and we are going to draw in some of our collaborators who can begin to share with you some more information about each of these projects.

The first project, understanding the recent rise in employment among people with disabilities, pre-COVID-19, is being led by Nicole and others at Harvard, and let me turn to Nicole for some deeper explanation about exactly what is this research study about, what are you trying to different policies and programs you're going to be looking at, and what kinds of impacts will you be studying?

>> **Nicole Maestas:** Thank you, Michael. We were really, this project has really motivated by what has turned out to be an unprecedented increase in the level of employment among people with disabilities that occurred during the most recent economic expansion. And, I mean, many people are probably inclined to attribute it to the strong economy, but what we noticed was that in the wake of other recessions, as the economy recovered, there really wasn't this same kind of sustained increase in employment by people with disabilities.

And not only did you see employment rates rising among people with disabilities by more than they were rising among people without disabilities, but we saw as well that people were exiting the SSDI program for successful work efforts at higher rates than ever before.

And this too was a rather pronounced and sustained trend that really hadn't received much attention and certainly had received virtually no study at all.

So, what we want the idea behind this project really is to see if we can use rigorous quasi experimental research methods to peel apart this increase in employment and identify policies that might have helped fuel this rise in employment.

And the idea here of course, you know, we recognize it's no longer the pre-COVID-19 era, but if we could understand what worked before, perhaps we can then translate some of that knowledge into helping us understand how an economic recovery as it begins to play out, as it's already beginning to play out, could be enhanced by policies that worked in the past.

We're looking at four policy areas as a start. And they include the passage of ObamaCare, the Affordable Care Act, which expanded access to, as you know, public and private health insurance. So that will be one area, what effect did the ACA have on the employment of people with disabilities? Did it facilitate employment at greater rates in this population?

We'll also be looking at state investments in home and community based services. These services are essential services and supports for many people that may enable employment and we had like to examine those in greater detail to see what impact that might have had.

We'll also look at state vocational rehabilitation policies. And these policies were intended to expand the use of supported employment services and to serve previously underrepresented disability groups. And we'd like to understand what worked there and in particular what were the specific mechanisms that seemed to work best.

And then the last area we'll look at is the so called 1619B Work Incentive Program. And what that all means is that people who are participating in the SSI program can maintain their Medicaid coverage as their earnings rise, even as they might, their SSI benefits are phased out under this special work incentive program and the idea there is that states around the U.S. have different thresholds at which this like protection kicks in and we'd like to understand that as well.

I'll turn it over, back to you, Michael.

>> **Michael Morris:** Thank you. Thank you, Nicole. That's one project, but you might say there's enough there you're looking at so many different policies, really very comprehensive look across many particular funding streams and policies. Going to be fascinating what we learn from that and what we can translate to try to improve Social Security and other policies in the future, as you mentioned, healthcare, vocational rehabilitation, and others.

We'll go to project 2, which is about SSDI return to work improvement through financial and benefits counseling.

This project is a joint effort between researchers at Syracuse Burton Blatt Institute and the group at National Disability Institute. At NDI, there has been the development of an effective approach with the Ticket to Work program. The Ticket to Work program enables people on Social Security benefits to have alternative choices beyond vocational rehabilitation to either try to get into the workforce, become employed for the first time, or perhaps to return to work.

And the group at National Disability Institute is called the American Dream Employment Network. Or known by its acronym ADEN. ADEN is effectively managing almost, I believe, 75 employment networks, and is working with over 600 Social Security beneficiaries helping them either get a job for the first time or return to work. They're having tremendous success rate. Their success rate is with the folks they're working with and the network of employment networks across the country, they're actually having successful employment outcomes I believe with over 70% of the individuals with disabilities that they're working with.

Well, that's just background information to understand that what we wanted to look at here, focusing on people on SSDI and return to work

possibilities is looking at a very specific intervention of enhancing financial and benefits counseling in a discrete, selected, targeted number of employment networks are going to get this extra intervention, the individuals with disabilities who are Social Security beneficiaries. And then there will be a control group, a number of employment networks that are a part of ADEN, that are not getting this more extra financial and benefits counseling.

What we hope we will be able to do with this study is to test the efficacy of integrated and benefits and financial counseling for adult recipients of SSDI over age 21. What we hope is that this approach will involve active engagement in making informed and meaningful choices for Social Security beneficiaries and that the result of this intervention, financial and benefits counseling, actually further improves the possibilities in terms of advancing pathways to greater financial stability.

So, this is a study that will employ a random control trial and never been done before with this particular group of individuals. And Peter, I'm just going to ask you if you'd like to make a comment as well about this second project.

>> Peter Blanck: I think, can you hear me, Michael?

>> **Michael Morris:** Yes, we can hear you.

>> **Peter Blanck:** No, I think you've described it well. I think that as you say, without economic security and economic hope and advancement, employment rings hollow, no matter how intrinsically motivated people may be. So, this is a core understudied element for this population.

>> **Michael Morris:** Fantastic. Okay. Let's go to project 3 and project 3 and 4 and we're going to turn to our team at Rutgers and I think I turn it over to Doug.

>> **Doug Kruse:** Okay. Doug Kruse here, I'm very glad to join this join this webinar. Lisa is here as well. I'm going to give just a brief description of project 3 and Lisa will give a brief description of project 4. Project 3 is on unemployment insurance.

Unemployment insurance, economists have studied unemployment insurance in general a lot. But there really haven't been specific studies on unemployment insurance for among people with disabilities. The effects of people the importance and the effects of unemployment insurance for people with disabilities. And that's of interest of particular interest this year for two reasons.

One is that people with disabilities have been harder hit by the pandemic. The published Bureau of Labor Statistics data shows that total employment is down more for people with disabilities on a percentage basis than for people without disabilities.

So, people with disabilities are really being hit hard, and that's because they're a lot of them have been in kinds of service and, you know, retail jobs that involve a lot of customer contact, and that were deemed too risky.

So that's one reason this is of particular interest this year. Another reason is that the CARES Act that Congress passed in March had an extra \$600 supplement per week for all to unemployment insurance, to increase the value of unemployment insurance. And that's for all workers. That the effects of that may be especially important for people with disabilities because they tend to earn less and live in lower income households.

So, we're interested in looking at the importance of unemployment insurance for people with disabilities two basic outcomes. One is just family incomes in general - Is the you know, people with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty. Are we, does this extra \$600 per week play a role in helping keep them close to or above poverty level? How

is it affecting the family incomes? And secondly, how is it affecting return to work?

The big problem of course right now is lack of jobs, we're seeing some jobs come back, but we're going to we're going to try to look at how this unemployment insurance shapes the decision to come back to work, which is something that the economists have studied in general for workers in general, but not for specifically for workers with disabilities.

We're actually, I should mention, we're also doing a paper right now to look at the effects of the pandemic, we're going to be using the Bureau of Labor Statistics micro data to look at the effects of the pandemic on the employment of people with disabilities since January, and also do an intersectional analysis, how does this compare to the effects for Blacks, for women, and then the intersection for Blacks with disabilities, for women with disabilities, and so forth.

So that's our project 3 on unemployment insurance. I'll turn it to Lisa to describe project 4.

>> Lisa Schur: Hi. Yeah. So contingent work has been growing in general. And we're going to be looking contingent work among people with disabilities. And we're going to focus on the California bill AB 5

that extended employee status to many independent contractors. So, we're going to be looking at the effect of that on employment and earnings relative to other states. And, again, we're going to be having an intersectional approach and looking at the effects particularly on women, on people of color and so forth. And I should just have a caveat here that this bill might be overturned by the next election. In which case we will reformulate our project.

>> **Michael Morris:** Lisa, I think I and others have been watching the push in California. You know, I know the companies that have relied on contingent worker status like Uber and Lyft and others have pouring millions of dollars to try to see if that law will be overturned. But we'll know soon enough, and then we can pick up from there. But a pretty important study. If we can go to the next slide, please.

And so, we now have two parts to project 5. And for those I'm going to turn it over to Meera to share with you what was our focus and what we hope to accomplish

>> **Meera Adya:** Thank you, Michael. Can everyone hear me?

>> **Group:** Yes.

>> **Meera Adya:** Okay, great. So we present these two projects together because as I think you, Michael, have referred to them, they both cover innovative on-ramps to employment and we've structured the studies to follow a similar pattern of investigation, which is to understand how these innovative programs are structured and working to recruit individuals with disabilities and promote their employment and what the employment outcomes at the end of the day are.

And this will hopefully inform policy and the development of similar programs.

These two programs are apprenticeship and entrepreneurship in terms of being part of the supply chain.

When we look at apprenticeship, it's a nontraditional path to economic advancement and employment. It combines both on the job training as well as classroom instruction with a paycheck. And it gets you entry to a higher skilled job that pays well without a college degree.

It is one of the oldest forms of training. And it involves learning under the direction of a senior, working of a senior worker. Because the training is part of the job, apprentices do not have to forego income while learning, which avoids one of the main barriers to receiving training in specialized skills.

Apprenticeship has also been demonstrated to dramatically raise workers' wages from the time they complete training, and then they continue to benefit from that over the course of their careers.

Prior research on apprenticeship programs in general has demonstrated that an apprenticeship can earn an average starting an apprentice can earn an average starting salary of more than \$60,000 and over their careers they can earn \$300,000 more than comparable job seekers.

And after apprenticeship completion, 94% of apprentices retain their employment. Extremely high retention rates.

And then today, getting picked up across the news wire in various venues such as NBR and the Wall Street Journal, we see a study released by Opportunity America and Brookings that looked at a program in Kentucky and found apprenticeship increased earnings by 63%. So the goal with our work is to understand how are apprenticeship programs being structured so that they can include people with disabilities, where are barriers that can be removed, and for those that are already including people with disabilities, how are their outcomes in comparison to the outcomes we've just discussed and heard about.

And what can we do to make them comparable.

Similar to this analysis or inquiry, we're looking at as I mentioned, entrepreneurship and how that relates to the field of supplier diversity and the opportunities it creates for disability employment.

Supplier diversity is of course part of the supply chain that incorporates businesses owned by diverse individuals or groups that are part of a traditionally underserved or underrepresented group.

Existing examples include minority owned business enterprises, women owned business enterprises, service disabled veteran owned small businesses or veteran owned small businesses.

But thanks to the leadership of Disability:IN, we now have disability owned business enterprises. They are certified through Disability:IN, and a large business can now draw from a pool of small businesses to become part of their supply chain that they know have been certified and ensured to be disability owned, disability controlled.

The certification is recognized by a growing number of states which has extended their procurement preferences to DOBEs as well, disability owned business enterprises. So, these are opportunities that cut then across both the private sector with large private businesses and the public sector when it comes to state or federal procurement.

We will look at how these businesses that are certified gain access to the supply chain of businesses and states. And how that impacts not only their economic outcomes as a business but creates employment for these employees and sustains it.

And then we will share that information through the knowledge translation partners that Michael reviewed in the hopes that further positive programs can be developed and barriers can be removed.

And I'll turn it back to you, Michael.

>> Michael Morris: Okay, thank you, Meera. I think those of you listening can get a sense of the breadth and diversity of issues, policy issues that the center proposes to take up. But there are still more. And so, I'll turn next to project 6, which looks at, is going to be looking at paid sick and family medical leave and exactly what are the policy implications for people with disabilities. And I think I go back to you, Doug.

>> Doug Kruse: Yes, back to me. Glad to talk about this project. There's been growing interest nationally in paid sick leave and in fact some proposals to do it on a national basis. Paid family leave. The Family Medical Leave Act provides provisions for unpaid leave. But not for paid leave.

Some states have implemented paid leave policies, such as New Jersey, where I'm from now. Where employees are entitled to some kind of paid leave or medical issues, sickness, and so forth. What we're, we've got, I forget how many it is, it's like eight or nine states that have done this.

What we're going to do is what's called quasi experiment, social scientists like these quasi experiments. We can't do a fully randomized experiment, we would love to do a randomized experiment where we impose, you know, family leave policies randomly in the population and then look at the outcomes, well, obviously we can't do that. But we can do a quasi-experiment where we analyze the places where it has been implemented and do before and after comparisons.

For example, New Jersey implemented the paid family leave as I said, and we can compare outcomes for people with and without disabilities relative to the rest of the population before New Jersey implemented it and after it relative to other states that are similar to New Jersey. So pre/post with comparisons with a control group. So, we're going to be focusing on the effects that paid leave may have for people with disabilities in particular for their employment and earnings. Paid leave may quite honestly, it may go either way.

We, you know, people with disabilities often have health issues that make paid leave very important, it maybe help them maintain employment. But to be honest, it could be could go the other way as well with employers are reluctant to hire workers with disabilities, because they're afraid the workers may end up having to take these leaves and cause disruptions in the business. So that could go either way.

So, yes, we'll be doing an analysis using census data, the American Community Survey data, millions of observations on individuals looking at all 50 states doing comparisons on the family leave and paid sick leave as well.

Should I go on to the next project?

>> **Michael Morris:** Yes, thanks, Doug.

>> **Doug Kruse:** I will talk as well about the minimum and subminimum wages. Minimum wage is another topic that economists have studied I was going to say studied to death. It's been an, there's been literally hundreds and hundreds of studies on the minimum effect of minimum wages, but not focused on the effects of subminimum wages on people with disabilities. And that could be very important because people with disabilities, you know, if minimum wage

has an effect, it tends to have an effect on the lower skilled workers, people with lower education, less training, and so forth, and people with disabilities are disproportionately lower skill workers with lower levels of education.

So, we're going to look at the effects of minimum wage legislation. And here, again, we're comparing among states, as states are allowed to establish minimum wages higher than the federal level, and many states have done that. So, we can do pre/post comparisons, those quasi experiments again, comparing states that where the minimum wage went up to otherwise similar states where the minimum wage did not go up. And looking at outcomes in particular the employment levels but also incomes of and poverty rates among workers with disabilities.

An extra twist to this, if that's the right word, is that the federal legislation that established the minimum wage, the Fair Labor Standards Act, back in 1989, allows employers to pay a subminimum wage to workers with disabilities under special circumstances where there's measurement of productivity and the workers are, you know, found to have, you know, say only 50% of the productivity on some task of a worker without a disability, then they can be paid 50% of what the

workers without disabilities are paid. And that may be less than the minimum wage.

So, they're allowed to pay subminimum wages. This is often used in sheltered workshops, places like Goodwill and is so forth established these for people primarily with developmental disabilities. Much this has been very controversial in the disability movement, and one of the big policy discussions is whether to end that subminimum wage provision, it's called the 14C provision.

And in fact, I just noticed that the Biden campaign is saying that they are pledging to remove that. So that's a big policy issue. We don't know much about how subminimum, if I can say that right, subminimum wages affect the earnings of workers with disabilities. If we get rid of the subminimum wage, as Biden wants to do, is it that it's going to destroy a lot of job opportunities for workers with disabilities or is it going to raise their wages and raise their incomes and then put them on par with other workers.

So we're going to be doing once again quasi experiment, looking at states that have higher minimum wages than those that don't, and also looking at some states have phased out like Vermont and several others have phased out support for sheltered workshops that pay subminimum wages and we will be looking at those policies and seeing

how what outcomes look like for people with disabilities in those states.

>> Michael Morris: Great, thank you, Doug. And our, go on to project 8, which is about looking at telework, which of course in this environment today of COVID has taken on new meaning. And let me turn to Elaine to talk about this project.

>> Elaine Zundl: Hi, thank you. So, the idea is similar to what Professor Kruse just mentioned, that we will be also using a, well, a natural experiment to examine how home based work for workers with disabilities has changed as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

You know, we know that telework is definitely more popular now and firms have been more creative in finding ways to accommodate workers' need for telework. And so we want to know if this is also impacted the rate of home based work by disability status, so we'll be comparing pre-2020 telework to post hopefully by 2021 things will have improved a bit, but we'll also, we'll be comparing 2020 to 2021 to see whether this is really changed working arrangements and improve the ability of folks to work regardless of disability status to work at home.

So we'll be using the census, obviously the ACS, and as well as the American Time Use Survey to estimate these effects and we'll also

conduct a survey, an original survey of teleworkers with and without disabilities in large firms in the Disability:IN network, and try to identify the rate of home-based work before and after the crisis.

We also want to explore the effects of telecommuting, you know, on a range of other outcomes, like work family integration, workload and responsibilities and job satisfaction.

You know, we, the issue of flexibility has, is a key theme in the literature for workers with disabilities. But we know managers and employees have expressed a variety of concerns with telework arrangements. Right now everyone, you know, people seem to believe that telework is a panacea for everybody with work life balance issues, and for those who care for workers with disabilities, but we're also seeing that the lack of child care and the restriction of movement right now during the crisis complicates whether or not this is really an effective solution to a lot of these problems.

And working from home can be a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, but a number of employers have been resistant to work at home along with other ADA requirements.

So, given the lack of research on work at home arrangements among people with disabilities, we are going to, you know, meaningfully

hopefully contribute to both the incidents and efforts of home-based work among workers with disabilities. And our original survey will include questions on unpaid work, work family balance, and we're hoping our analysis will also contribute to a small growing number of studies on telecommuting business practices and work family life.

So, yeah.

>> **Michael Morris:** That's fantastic. Thank you. Can we go to the next slide, please? So as you listen to this body of studies, I think it's important to understand that not only are they going to help create new evidence based options for employment related policy development and perhaps enable whether it's policymakers, employment service providers, rehabilitation or workforce development professionals or individuals with disabilities, new ways to think about and to develop strategies to support job seekers with disabilities and that the evidence based practices that we learn about through some of these studies will absolutely help enhance worker retention as well as was mentioned in the last study really get at some of the issues around quality of work experience.

I think that it's also important to understand that each of these studies doesn't sit in a silo by itself. That ultimately our goal is over these five years of the Center being funded by NIDILRR, that new data and

evidence will begin to emerge that will help generate a next generation of employment policy and programs that are supported by vigorous and rigorous research.

We're hopeful in years four and five of the Center that we can look across these studies and really begin to hypothesize about both next generation research that's needed but also look at the possibilities of creating a next generation disability policy framework that takes us hopefully away from some of the historic challenges of the past, whether it's subminimum wage or it's the difficulties of entry into skilled jobs and opportunities through apprenticeships or even as we've mentioned it has to do with a next generation of entrepreneurs with disabilities and people with disabilities owning their own businesses and being a part of the supply system for large corporations for products and services. That the work that is being proposed here does enable us to think differently both within each policy area but across policy areas that are both about disability specific policy, youth in transition with IDEA for youth with disabilities in school, the rehabilitation services act, the Rehabilitation Act, and how vocational rehabilitation services are delivered.

But far broader than that in terms of Social Security policy, tax policy, economic policy, really trying to understand can we create a framework

where we do move ahead from what now 30 years after the passage of the ADA and even pre-COVID really showed that we have a long way to go to see comparable employment rates for people of working age with and without disabilities.

Peter, let me call on you too with some of your observations as you think, you know, more globally across the next five years about the work of the Center, are there some additional thoughts about expected outcomes?

>> **Peter Blanck:** Well, thank you, Michael. What a fantastic discussion. Clearly given the environment we live in, besides COVID and the terrific reassessment reckoning of racial issues, Black Lives Matter issues, Me Too, the findings and the analyses clearly are driven by this intersectional approach that is all people have multiple minority or sometimes majority identities, sometimes depending upon the context, say in work versus home life, certain identities are dominant. Or certain identities tend to form in clumps and we perceive them in that manner.

So clearly, we have to take all of these issues in the context in which we are grappling with today.

The second thing in terms of a policy perspective, I was particularly interested in Doug's view of the sheltered workshop program, having years ago now studied about 3,000 people in that program in one particular state, it always struck me that it was as much a funding policy confused issue as it was an empirical issue in that many sheltered workshops exist but could also be for someday rehab programs, rehabilitation programs, the whole range of things, but for the particular funding mechanism in which providers have been set up, they result in these below minimum wage basically centers.

And so, one answer to that, which is reflective of our more metapolicy approach is clearly the funding mechanism, the definitional mechanism is in large part a failure with regard to these placements as much as it is putting qualified people in those segregated environments as well. And my hope, for example, then is we will be able to understand the nature of these funding mechanisms so that we don't see a reduction in appropriate and meaningful supports, whether they're in the community or elsewhere, but so that they're directed in the proper ways to allow people maximum integration, but at the same time not throwing the baby out with the bath water for strong community based services.

So those are some of the reflections I have, Michael. It really is an exciting, exciting group, and part of the excitement is learning together, learning with our community, being driven by the community, and these real-time discussions, which are more pressing than ever as many of us know, as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, our world is very much the same, but in many ways different than it was when that law was signed into practice. And I only hope that we can continue those aspirations for economic self-sufficiency, independence in living, and a lack of segregation of course for all individuals across the spectrum of disabilities.

So, thank you, Michael, that's my two cents, once again.

>> **Michael Morris:** Excellent, thanks, Peter. Can we go to the next slide, please?

So just to clarify further, who is going to be the target audience for what we learn in each of these studies and across these research studies, so again, we're thinking very broadly about targeted communities, of course people with disabilities and their families and allies and supporters. Policymakers, policy is not just done at a federal level, but as you heard from Doug, we're also be examining policy at a state level and in some cases local level. We're also targeting the whole

delivery system, both the VR and workforce development professionals, as well as other employment service providers.

And of course, you can't think about employment and economic policy without also targeting the business community, all sectors and sizes, HR professionals that control the entry point for people with and without disabilities entering businesses and also providing career paths.

And of course, when you think about this topic is although this is a very robust set of policy issues that we're taking on, there are always going to be generated more questions. And this research will generate a next generation of new questions. So, we'll also be targeting researchers and students across multiple disciplines, both at an undergraduate and graduate level.

Next slide, please.

There are methods to translate knowledge. We are working now on a website for the new center. We're hopeful it will be up before Thanksgiving. It will offer usable, accessible materials, webinars and papers and really all the efforts of the center will be both cataloged and you can keep pace with what's going on through the website. There will be working papers and reports from each of the studies. There will be employment policy briefs and articles for you, if you represent

different organizations, public and private, to be able to utilize and put in your own newsletters. There will be of course peer reviewed academic articles and key journals. We do expect to look at the possibilities of one or more communities of practice.

And then really at the, towards the end of the five year period in year four we look to working with the national governor's association and also with CSAVR on the possibilities of some virtual academies to take this new body of evidence and really apply it in terms of both policy development and program implementation.

And then finally in the last year, years away from where we started now, we hope to do a State of Science Conference where we really try as a group across disciplines in terms of researchers, but also actively engaging people with disabilities and the many types of employment service professionals to really try to build on the knowledge that is going to be created from this center to try to translate and transform where public policy goes in the future that impacts the employment and economic advancement of people across the full spectrum of disabilities.

So that will be down the road, but it's something that will be open to all of you as well.

Next slide, please.

So I know that before we look at some questions which may have come in in the chat box or the Q&A, here is information on how to reach some of us when the website goes up it will have more information on other collaborators and key people, you can be in touch with. But here's the emails to connect to some of us that you have heard from today. And I think with that, Barry, I'm going to turn to you, I'm less familiar with your platform. Can we go to, is there a way to look at the Q&A or the chat box in terms of some of the questions that may have come in?

>> **Barry Whaley:** Right, right, yeah, thank you, Michael. Looking at the chat right now and folks, if you have questions for anybody on this panel, please go ahead and type them into the chat. The first question I think you answered, was from Jennifer Hicks - hi, Jennifer. She was curious about our knowledge translation, she asks "will we be able to see results of this study." And Number 2: Our DD counsel is working developing on a benefits counseling project, not necessarily a question, I think, but a statement.

So, I think you answered the knowledge translation and especially when the website is up and running, I think we'll be good there. I don't

know, Michael, if you have anything to add to the knowledge translation activities that we may have forgotten?

>> **Michael Morris:** Yeah. I would expect that when the website goes live, there will be an opportunity for people to sign up for updates on the research as it progresses. On the one person who you mentioned I think with Developmental Disabilities Council, if she's particularly interested in the study related to financial and benefits counseling, she can write me at my email that's on the screen and certainly be glad to provide some additional information and see if we can be of any support to that council.

>> **Barry Whaley:** Very good. Great. Thank you. Scrolling through here...

Well, there was a discussion about the 14C certificates.

I'm trying to decipher it. During COVID and using government funds, they do, there's a discussion of a training center, a lot of industries that just eliminated their 14C subminimum wage certificate. Staff took a pay cut. But hopefully they will stay afloat. Doug, I don't know if you had anything to add to 14C certificates. I'm not seeing generally a question here.

>> **Doug Kruse:** That's really interesting to hear, and actually, it will be interesting to see what places may have suspended their applications for 14C. You do, if you want the 14C subminimum wage, you do have to apply to the to the department, the U.S. Department of Labor. And so, and [indiscernible] of all the ones that do apply, it will be interesting, we may be able to do some case studies of companies that or organizations that have suspended that or, yeah, terminated that.

>> **Barry Whaley:** Yeah, that's interesting. Yet another unexpected benefit of worldwide pandemic may be the necessity of eliminating 14C. I don't see any other questions coming in right now, folks. If you have questions, we have a little bit of time before we wrap up.

>> **Michael Morris:** Barry, I do see one question that came in.

>> **Barry Whaley:** Okay.

>> **Michael Morris:** It's a good one. What will be the most important components of a post COVID-19 policy framework to accelerate opportunities for employment? Again, that's a tremendous question, given where we are, the data that is in is showing that all people were not equally impacted at adversely impacted by COVID 19 in terms of employment.

People at the lower end of the economic ladder were hurt more and we have data to know from Department of Labor and Bureau of Labor Statistics that people with disabilities and particularly people with disabilities at the intersectionality of disability and race and their ethnicity were impacted the worst, probably, again, because they were in more service jobs, not white collar jobs.

And there is a lot of discussion going on about many, many jobs that will not come back, which will require new approaches in terms of training, workforce develop, but I think it's also what makes very interesting two of the studies that you heard about today, the one that's exploring opportunities through inclusive apprenticeships as an alternative ramp into getting good paying jobs, and the other about entrepreneurship and disability owned businesses and many of those businesses also tend to hire more people with disabilities.

So, we're going to be learning a lot through those studies, but I'm because we have a little bit of time, I'm going to ask some of the research team if they have their own insights or ideas, they'd like to share in terms of answering this question. I will read it again. What would be the most important components of a post COVID-19 policy framework to accelerate opportunities for employment, obviously, for

people with disabilities? Peter, do you want to tackle that? Or give us some thoughts?

>> **Peter Blanck:** I can give some preliminary thoughts. I just sent around to our group a non-published article by a colleague of Nicole's at the Harvard Medical School who has estimated, if I read it right, that as a result of COVID about 2.5 million life years have been lost. I have to check whether that's just the United States or not.

So, one big issue is we're in a race against time. We do not have time to waste because if we don't mitigate those sorts of trends, which obviously are related to employment life to wellness and disability and to benefits programs, huge implications for the long term liability of benefits programs, then we're in big trouble. And moreover, most sadly, many people will die prematurely and many of those will be in poverty.

So that's not meant to be a sobering or downer sort of a note, I think the positive spin, if there is one, is we have begun, we're on it, and I hope that in a significant but modest and incremental way we can begin to address these challenges with the type of immediacy that is really needed in that regard.

So that's, again, two cents from me, Michael. Comment by others, Nicole may know the colleague, his name is Eldridge.

>> **Michael Morris:** I'm not sure if Nicole is still with us.

>> **Nicole Maestas:** I'm here, I'm here. Yeah, yeah, yeah. You make a really good point, as does his work about life years lost. I, you know, I'm thinking and worrying a lot these days just about the long term health impacts of having gotten COVID, you know, if you survive, right?

And this seems to be kind of an area of active research where we are still learning about the many ways in which this disease affects the various body systems. And, you know, that in itself has, you know, wide implications.

I know the Social Security Administration has been convening teams of medical experts to try and understand, you know, what might we see in terms of disability rates going forward that really kind of had their origins in contracting COVID.

You know, on the, I love, I love Beth's question, you know, and I have to, you know, my first kind of thinking here is that, boy, you know, if we knew the answer to that and, boy do I wish we did, you know, we wouldn't have such great need for the research that we'll all be undertaking. I just I feel like that's really kind of been kind of a missing

framework in this area is, you know, kind of both, you know, big picture and kind of micro level thinking about this, you know, challenge, if you will.

And, you know, as I kind of explained earlier, we want to look back and see, well, what work last time and can anything, you know, anything that we might learn there, will that be, will that be relevant going forward? I think as you saw from the, you know, this wide array of projects that we'll all be working on collectively is like we're trying to kind of go at it from every possible angle to see what we can, what we can learn and, you know, we've already started, we've already got data files up and running and we're trying to just, you know, work as fast as we can.

>> **Peter Blanck:** Michael, if I may make a quick comment?

>> **Michael:** Yes.

>> **Peter Blanck:** That was 2.5 million life years of expectancy in the U.S., which translates into about 13 less years of living per person, so far, as a result of 194,000 premature deaths.

So, there are some very stark issues that we are dealing with as Nicole has correctly pointed out.

>> **Barry Whaley:** And Peter, we have a question that aligns with that study from Alicia Hall, who works for vocational rehabilitation. She says is there any consideration being given to those with disabilities who are looking for employment prior to COVID but due to being at higher risk category may be fearful and are not utilizing services to obtain employment at this time and in COVID is no longer a concern. So, I'll throw that out to you and the panel.

>> **Peter Blanck:** That's a brilliant question. I've litigated that. And lost already. Representing working with lawyers who are representing, I was providing the expert testimony, individuals who were going to take the California bar examination with disabilities, who were, quote, COVID susceptible, and they would have to take it in person.

And the whole issue with the docs involved, the medical doctors and others, was trying to assess in this quasi employment context what were the risks to these individuals with particular disabilities of attending this work professional function in situ, and for various procedural reasons we did not prevail.

But increasingly, those types of questions will come up and as part of reasonable accommodations, of course, under the ADA, the question is will we continue to see types of remote work and as Doug and Lisa and

others are studying, that may vary tremendously as a function of the type of work, education, wage levels and so forth.

So very good, but complicated question. Defer to others, Nicole, Doug, Meera? Others.

>> **Doug Kruse:** I can jump in here. And actually, just one backtracking one quick sec to the previous question about the theme, you know, for post pandemic disability policy, I actually think one theme, and maybe this is obvious, is goes back to what Elaine was talking about, the flexibility angle. I think the flexibility in terms of, you know, work from home but paid leave and so forth, I think flexibility is an important issue for everyone, but especially for people with disabilities. And I think that is a theme that we'll tie together a lot of the policy.

Regarding this current question, Alicia's question about the people with disabilities who are looking for employment prior to COVID, that is actually a really interesting issue, and we will be looking at how not how the pandemic is affected not just employment levels, but also unemployment rates. That is, it may have affected not just number of people who have a job, but the number of people who are looking for jobs.

And we have the BLS microdata that we can use to analyze that, and also, I don't know how detailed we'll be able to get in terms of what kinds of services they're using, but we can find out what did they do to look for a job. Did they use, you know, regular state employment services and so forth. So, we'll be able to shed some light on whether unemployed people, how many unemployed people there are, maybe they've drop out of the labor force, and among the unemployed people there are, how are they looking for jobs. Are they doing it just by looking through the paper, which they can do in their own home, or are they actually going out and traipsing to interview places or partially interviewing by Zoom?

So that's great question, we'll be looking at that.

>> **Barry Whaley:** Great, thank you, Doug. We have another question from Joan Oreal. Joan is asking how are potential employers being addressed and informed? I presume as a result of the studies. Is there any kind of advertising, for instance, public service announcements, et cetera, being used? Michael, I'm going to throw that to you.

>> **Michael Morris:** Obviously the bulk of knowledge translation work is in the future. Always open to other ideas and means to get the information out in formats, methods, different modalities to reach the

people that need to learn from the new knowledge created from the center. I do think with employers we have an extraordinary partner in Disability:IN.

Disability:IN has direct links to really most of I think the Fortune 200, so the largest companies in the United States, but they also work with more medium size and smaller employers. And they will be a key partner to try to reach the business community and hopefully help them craft new strategies that open the doors for people with disabilities who are qualified to come into work.

I think some of it will be about flexibility of what are essential functions of the job in the future will be very different, perhaps in a post COVID environment, but we're open to your suggestions and just write us if you have thoughts on additional ways that we can reach people who are policymakers and in the public sector and decision makers in the private sector.

>> **Barry Whaley:** Thank you, Michael. We have actually a statement, but I think it's a very good one that our panel may want to comment on from Suzanne Osenba, she said, “we have worked so hard to get our people out of their home and since COVID hit they are back in. With all the fears of going outside, I wonder how this will affect how are people, presuming people with disabilities, in the long run, health wise.”

>> **Michael Morris:** This is Michael. I'm not by any means a health expert, but I think just in the past five days, begin to see more articles about survivors of COVID who are seeing long term health challenges that so much more needs to be studied of those who survive and of course for people with chronic health conditions, people with disabilities who are even more susceptible to adverse consequences of being COVID victims, it's a huge area to work in.

The delivery of healthcare services is changing, and how, what services will be reimbursed both in the public healthcare system, Medicaid, Medicare, but also private insurers through employers, private insurance recognizing few visits are person to person, telehealth is bigger than ever before, but I think this is a big issue.

I think the number of people who are, who clearly in the millions who are COVID survivors but may be long term impacted as one of the commenters in the chat box or has put in, lungs and other systems impact. We really don't know. And this doesn't even begin to touch the challenges from the mental health side of prolonged social isolation and what's that impact on people already with disabilities and chronic health conditions, but others who from isolation are facing new challenges.

So, I think, and Nicole is probably in best position, is probably at the core of your work at Harvard, is the intersection between health and financial stability but also between health and employment. I do know one of the things that has been pointed out over and over again in the last few months is how health coverage so linked to employment when so many millions of people lost their jobs, they also lost health coverage. And so perhaps in the next administration we're going to see finally the attention it deserves is solving short and long term healthcare needs of all Americans.

But others may want to add.

>> Barry Whaley: We have about eight minutes left. And really this entire last few minutes of conversation are also conversations, Michael, we have been having internally at Southeast ADA Center. Discussions of people being fearful to return to work in the COVID environment and asking for accommodations and then employers not granting those accommodations. And then as a result, people are no longer qualified individuals if they're not performing the essential functions of the job.

And then the other thing that we have been discussing internally is, you know, as we move forward and as the pandemic continues, at some point some sort of decision making has to occur, is COVID itself then a disability that affects a major life area and do you have protections

even in recovery under the second prong of disability determination of having a record of having a disability.

Interesting thing to think about.

We have about seven minutes. If someone would like to make a summary, Michael or others, now would be the time.

>> **Michael Morris:** I'm not sure it's a summary, but I do think as Peter mentioned, we've got a great team, we've got a great group of collaborators to help translate what's going to be learned over the next five years out to the many targeted audiences we discussed. So, appreciate the opportunity today to really provide an orientation to this new NIDILRR funded Center on Disability Inclusive Employment Policy Research and Training.

Peter, your thoughts?

>> **Peter Blanck:** No, I'm good. I've said enough already.

>> **Michael Morris:** All right. Anybody else, just closing comments?

>> **Doug Kruse:** This is Doug. I'll just say we're very excited at Rutgers to be part of this. Looking forward greatly to diving into these datasets and collecting new data and look forward very much to making these results useful to people with disabilities, because that's what it's all

about. We're going to, of course we will publish an academic article or two about this, but we're going to, but the really important thing is to make sure this helps improve the lives of people with disabilities.

So, we're looking forward very much to this.

>> **Barry Whaley:** Okay. Well, I'll go ahead and I'm sorry, Peter, did you have something?

>> **Peter Blanck:** No, I was just astonished, we've never finished early before.

>> **Barry Whaley:** I know, right?

[Laughter]

Well, I'll go ahead and wrap it up then. I want to thank Peter Blanck, Nicole Maestas, Meera Adya, Elaine Zundl, Doug Kruse, and of course Michael Morris for being with us today talking about the RRTC Disability Inclusive Employment Policy Center.

I want to remind our listeners that this is the third of fourth events in the Virtual Series: Disability Employment: Looking Forward, or Looking Back and Moving forward. Next week will be a very interesting webinar featuring directors, innovative directors from vocational rehabilitation, talking about the future of VR.

As a reminder, for example credit is available. You can receive a Certificate of Completion for this webinar. To receive that certificate, you must meet four requirements.

1. Number 1, you must have been registered.
2. Number 2, you must listen to all of the webinar.
3. Number 3, your attendance to this entire webinar series must be verified.
4. And 4, you must complete the online multiple choice Post-Test for this webinar.

Do we have another slide, Marsha? Can you push the picture? There we go. This is Max. This is Michael Morris' dog. He is the Director of Dogma at the National Disability Institute. It could be that he is an Easter egg question on that Post-Test that you will see in the next half hour or so.

After you submit the Post-Test and verify your attendance, you will be provided with a link to print your Certificate of Completion for this webinar. A copy of the Certificate of Completion will also be sent to the email address you provided when accessing the Post-Test for this webinar.

And as always, your feedback is very important to us. We use your feedback, your input to improve the quality of our webcast as well as identify topics for future webinars.

The link to the Post-Test and the evaluation for the webinar will be emailed to all registered participants within a half hour after the webinar ends.

This webinar along with all materials in the four event series will be archived with recording, transcript, and presentation.

We encourage your colleagues and friends to share the link to archives for this virtual series at: adasoutheast.org/webinars/archives.php.

I want to thank you again for being with us today for this webinar, the third of four events to celebrate National Disability Employment Awareness Month, the 30th anniversary of the ADA, and the 100th anniversary of vocational rehabilitation.

As a reminder, if you have questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act, you can contact your regional ADA center at 1 800 -949 -4232. Again, that's 1 800-949-4232. Or the Southeast ADA Center, you can call us directly at 404-541-9001. Or you can email us at adasoutheast@law.syr.edu. And remember, all calls and emails are confidential.

So, thanks again for being with us today. And we look forward to your attendance next Wednesday as we talk about the future of vocational rehabilitation.

End of Transcript

Event 3 of 4: RRTC Disability Inclusive Employment Policy Center

Virtual Series: Disability Employment – Looking Back & Moving Forward

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