Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Employment Policy and Measurement (EPM-RRTC)

Andrew J. Houtenville, Ph.D.
David Wittenburg, Ph.D.
EPM-RRTC Team

AAPD
American Association
of People with Disabilities

Corell University
Founded A.D. 1865

University of New Hampshire

Burton Blatt Institute
Syracuse University

Center for Studying
Disability Policy
Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Fordham University
The Jesuit University of New York
Motivation for the Center

• **Disparities:** Despite advances in programs, policies, and technology, there are **persistent** and **far-reaching** employment gap between people with and without disabilities!

• **Adverse Program Interactions:** Disability policy is spread across multiple agencies and jurisdictions. There is a concern that the lack of a coordinated policies may mean the conflict

• **Measurement:** Current measures and statistics relating to employment outcomes, accommodations, program participation, and services do not provide sufficient detail.
Why NIDRR?

- NIDRR is uniquely position:
  - It is the only government research institute that focused on disability issues.
  - It holds to the social model of disability, which recognizes the non-medical elements of disability and social participation.
  - It does not provide direct services and therefore is not vested in any one program or services approach, which is crucial given the possibility of interactions.
  - It is positioned to facilitate multi-agency agreements and research related to multiple programs.
Competitive Priorities

- **Impact of Policy**: “Increased knowledge of government policies and programs that affect employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities”

- **Measurement**: “Improved capacity to measure the employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities”

- **Knowledge Translation**: “Increased incorporation of research findings from the RRTC project into practice or policy”
Overview of Research Activities

• Policy issue briefs and forums
  – Pending fiscal crisis
  – Declining Employment

• Research Findings
  – Secondary data
  – Reviews of demonstrations

• Develop administrative capabilities for on-going research
  - Data use agreements
Selected Findings
Programs Influence Behavior

**Size of Program Overlaps**
- 65% of working-age people with disabilities participate in a safety-net program,

**Proposed Alternatives**
- DI trust fund projected to exhaust funds in 2016
- Several proposals exist for alternatives to SSDI (e.g., experience rating, private disability)
- Problem: No evidence of their effectiveness
- Need: Additional testing/experimentation
Program Participant Subgroups are Important

- Previous demonstrations:
  - Targeted narrow groups
    - Younger and those with psychiatric and cognitive impairments had largest employment impacts

- Importance of tracking outcomes for subgroups
  - SSDI beneficiaries are more likely to hit employment milestones for certain subgroups
    - Younger, seeking employment services, those who were awarded at initial level
Selected Health and Education Findings

- **Returns to Education**
  - Similar returns for people with early-onset physical disabilities and people without disabilities
  - People with early-onset mental disabilities fare worse
Current Trend Findings

• Great Recession had large effect on people with disabilities
  – Substantial loss of blue-collar and goods-producing jobs.
  – Possible permanent gap in these jobs

• Measures influence outcome
  – New “Supplemental” poverty measure shows smaller gap in poverty relative to previous measure
    • Post tax is very important
Informing the Public

- Interactions with Congressional staffers on key issues
- Newspaper citations
- Testimonies to House Ways and Means Committee.
- Presentations to the Social Security Advisory Board.
- Presentations to state staff
- Journal articles and policy briefs
Next Steps

• Planned studies
  – Health and education
  – Program interactions (especially using VR, SSA benefit, and earnings data)
  – Continued focus on measurement

• Continued response to policy makers
  – We need your input