



### Key Findings from the National Autism Indicators Report: Vocational Rehabilitation

This fact sheet summarizes key findings from the National Autism Indicators Report: Vocational Rehabilitation, which is at: [drexel.lu/autismindicators16](http://drexel.lu/autismindicators16). The National Autism Indicators Report tracks statistics about issues facing individuals on the autism spectrum. These statistics set the stage to discover whether quality of life for those with autism and their families is improving over time.



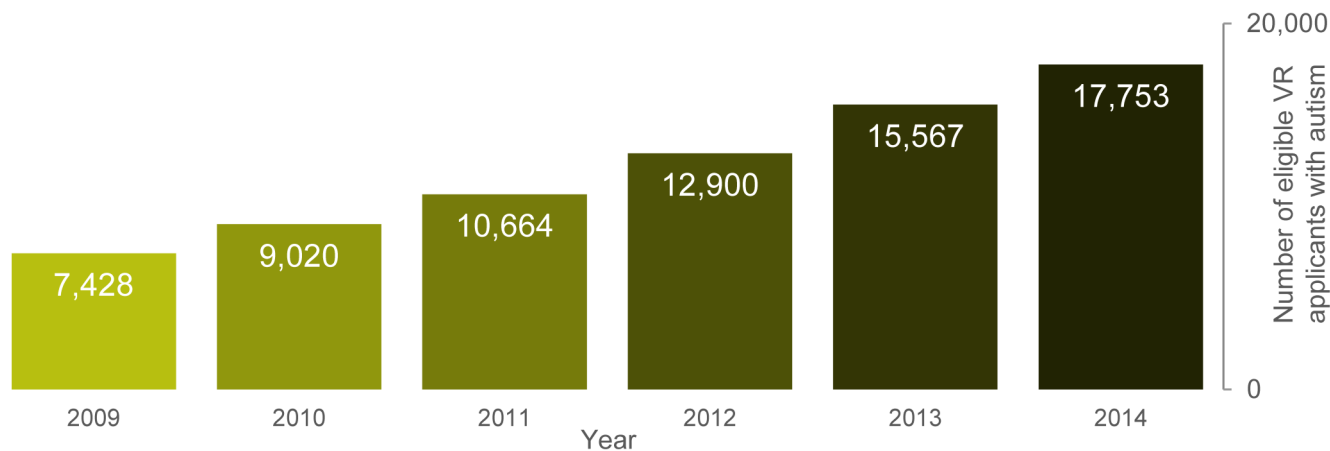
## Vocational Rehabilitation Background & Overview

The number of adults with autism who are turning to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) for help has been steadily increasing as the growing population of youth diagnosed with autism ages into adulthood. VR is the largest public funder of employment services in the United States for people with disabilities including autism. The VR system is administered by each state using a combination of federal and state funds. VR addresses a diverse array of employment support needs using a mix of VR agency staff (public employees) and contracted community rehabilitation programs (both non-profit and for-profit).

VR services can provide a bridge into the world of work as students prepare to exit school and enter adulthood. Yet, the VR system is not only for youth; it also provides services for working age adults.

Photo credit: Community Integrated Services

**The number of VR case closures for individuals with autism has increased steadily.**



## How does a person apply for VR services?

The VR application process may vary from state to state, but the basic requirements are as follows:

The individual or their representative must:

1. Complete and sign a VR agency application form; OR complete a common intake application form in a One-Stop center requesting vocational rehabilitation services, or otherwise request services;
2. provide the information necessary to initiate an assessment to determine eligibility and priority for services; and
3. be available to complete the assessment process.

## The Vocational Rehabilitation Process



The steps of the VR process may be completed by the person who requires services or by their legal guardian.

## What is the process for receiving VR services?

### Who can receive services?

All individuals with disabilities are eligible for VR services. Specifically, this includes a person:

1. who has a physical or mental impairment;
2. whose impairment substantially interferes with the ability to get a job;
3. and whose impairment requires VR services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment;
4. and intends to achieve an employment outcome.

### Who refers people for VR services?

Referrals may be made by the individual or representative in person, or by phone, paper, email, or other method. Others can also refer, including but not limited to: schools, community rehabilitation programs, employers, friends, and service providers. VR agencies must have a process in place to ensure that individuals expressing interest in VR services are able to access the program and apply for services in a timely manner.

### Do VR users pay for services?

Some states provide VR services at no charge to people who use the services, while others may require a contribution based on financial means testing. Each state must have a written policy detailing how financial means are tested and how costs are shared with participants. However, states are not allowed to charge participants for: assessment services, vocational rehabilitation counseling and guidance, referral and other services, job-related services, or personal assistance services.

### How is eligibility for VR services determined?

A VR counselor determines whether people meet the eligibility criteria, based on a review of existing records which include: the VR counselor's observations, education records, information provided by the individual or the individual's family, particularly information used by education officials, and determinations made by officials of other agencies.

If there are still questions about the person's functioning level, additional data is collected through trial work experiences, assistive technology devices and services, personal assistance services, and any other support services that are necessary to determine whether an individual is eligible. States may also provide for additional assessment and diagnostic services, such as sending an applicant to a specialist.

### How are decisions made about services?

If a person is deemed eligible for VR services, the next step is to create an **Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)** with the VR counselor. VR services cannot be delivered until the IPE is written and all parties approve it, including the person with autism or a legal guardian. People who are using VR services check in with the VR counselor periodically to review the IPE.

The IPE specifies an intended employment outcome for a person - meaning whether the goal is for the person to work in full-time or part-time competitive or supported employment, or another setting such as self-employment. If appropriate, the IPE outlines how supported employment will be provided and whether post-employment services will be provided. The IPE must also include the types of services required by the individual, the duration of services, who will provide the services, and criteria for how progress will be evaluated.

Once the specified duration of services is complete, or if an individual no longer needs help, services are terminated. The individual may be eligible for certain post-employment services if specified in the IPE.

## Important VR terms and concepts

### Who is a person with a significant disability?

According to VR, an individual with a significant disability is someone who:

1. has a physical or mental impairment that seriously limits one or more functional capacities (such as mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of an employment outcome;
2. can be expected to require multiple VR services over an extended period of time;
3. has one or more physical or mental disabilities resulting from amputation, arthritis, **autism**, blindness, burn injury, cancer, cerebral palsy, etc.

Individuals are classified as having:

- No significant disability
- Significant disability, or
- Most significant disability\*

\*A person with a “most significant disability” meets the above criteria and has additional functional limitations as defined by the VR agency.

### What is competitive work?

**Competitive employment** means work in the competitive labor market that is performed in an integrated setting with pay not less than the customary wage and level of benefits paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by individuals who are not disabled.

### What is an employment outcome?

The Rehabilitation Services Act defines what an employment outcome is in the eyes of the VR program. A person’s IPE states the intended employment outcome. All work must be in an integrated setting but may be:

- Without employment supports (competitive), with employment supports (supported employment), or as some other form of employment (including self-employment)
- Full-time or part-time

When a person exits VR, the VR counselor must report the employment outcome. A person is counted as employed if he or she holds a job for 90 days in integrated setting. The federal government does not count segregated work (facility-based employment, sometimes called “sheltered work,” that only employs people with disabilities, often at sub-minimum wage) as successful employment. Those who do not become employed are counted as exiting VR without employment.

### What is integrated work?

An **integrated setting** is a setting typically found in the community in which individuals interact with non-disabled coworkers in addition to the non-disabled individuals who are providing services. An integrated work setting provides disabled people with the same level of opportunities for interaction with coworkers without disabilities as any non-disabled person would have.

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*The Life Course Outcomes Research Program is building a base of knowledge about the things other than clinical interventions that promote positive outcomes for people on the autism spectrum and their families and communities.*