



WISCONSIN REHABILITATION COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

Federal Fiscal Year
2025





EXECUTIVE ORDER #182

The State Rehabilitation Council, commonly known as the Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council (WRC), was re-created by Gov. Tony Evers in 2023 under Executive Order 182. The WRC is required under 34 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 361 to advise and assist the Department of Workforce Development's (DWD) Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR).

WRC is composed of appointed members with disabilities and individuals representing a broad range of disability perspectives, such as family members and advocates appointed on behalf of relevant groups and associations.

WRC is required to deliver an annual report to the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and the Wisconsin Governor that summarizes findings on DVR operations and its services to consumers throughout the state. The data, graphics, and stories in this annual report reflect the work conducted by DVR staff, WRC committees, and the full council during federal fiscal year 2025 (FFY 2025), which took place between Oct. 1, 2024, and Sept. 30, 2025.

Data in this report was compiled through daily activities of DVR staff located around the state. DVR records are confidential by law. DVR staff are trained and required to maintain detailed documentation for each Wisconsin consumer who applies for DVR services. Data is entered and maintained in Wisconsin's Integrated Rehabilitation Information System (IRIS), DVR's official case management system.



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MESSAGE FROM THE WRC CHAIR

RICHARD STRAUB

At the close of the 2025 federal fiscal year, we can again look back at a year of continued change, challenges, and – more importantly – successes, thanks to the work of the Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council (WRC) and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). It has been a privilege to be able to work with DVR to help improve access and services to consumers needing the vital support the program provides. The number of consumers served in this program year has reached historic levels at 33,687, up from 30,943 last year. The dedicated staff at DVR whose work was critical to this accomplishment should be proud of their accomplishments.



During the past federal fiscal year, the WRC has been busy with the following list of activities and accomplishments that helped serve Wisconsin's DVR consumers:

- Initiated strategic planning discussions and developed the foundation for a strategic planning exercise.
- Filled several council vacancies in alignment with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) distribution guidelines. Two new members were recruited and trained.
- Requested an overview of other state councils related to work around disabilities. An overview of the Department of Health Services Councils was presented to the WRC.
- Reviewed recommendations based on the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and the DVR's response.
- Joined a report-out from a service provider working with DVR.
- Determined topics for future reports including more on other state councils related to disability issues, self-employment opportunities and successes, Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) expenditures, and a presentation on Wisconsin's assistive technology services, WisTech.

Additionally, DVR staff provided updates on several initiatives and ongoing activities within the agency including an update on competitive integrated employment activity, a review of the FFY 2025 outcomes, and an overview of the agency budget. Other topics reviewed by the WRC included an update on the DVR's employer connections and successes, an update on DVR's Career Pathways grant, an overview of Ticket to Work, Partnership Plus and Social Security, and ongoing reports from the Client Assistance Program. Additionally, the UW-Madison Waisman Center presented to the council on their autism support programs. The Wisconsin Council on the Blind and Visually Impaired and Beyond Vision also shared insight on their programs.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the work of all our volunteer WRC members. Collectively, these council members contribute to the common goal of supporting and improving services to people with disabilities in our community and they provide guidance to DVR for achieving that goal. I would especially like to thank those outgoing WRC members for their commitment and service.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Richard Straub". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.

Richard Straub
Chair, Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council

MESSAGE FROM DVR ADMINISTRATOR

MEREDITH DRESSEL

As DVR's administrator, I'm proud of our ongoing collaboration with the Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council. These individuals – who are appointed to three-year terms by the governor of Wisconsin – possess relevant perspectives about employment for those with disabilities, and their participation offers valuable input to DVR.

Our partnership with the WRC effectively connects those we serve with opportunities to obtain a job, retain a job, or seek promotional opportunities. This past year, DVR served more than 33,600 individuals and partnered with more than 3,200 employers to meet labor force needs. Notably, nearly 40% of those served were under the age of 25.

There are five committees within the council, and DVR representatives participate in each to discuss policies and processes that benefit individuals with disabilities across the state.

During federal fiscal year 2025 (Oct. 1, 2024, to Sept. 30, 2025), DVR collaborated with the WRC on several important issues:

- The Policy Review and Administration Committee and the Performance Measures and Quality Assurance Committee reviewed policy manual revisions and feedback from the April 2025 public input sessions.
- The Engagement Committee discussed strategies for recruiting new members to the council for key seats.
- The Business Engagement Committee provided input into business outreach strategies, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) activities, and recruitment for council members from the business community.

DVR provided the council an in-depth review of the 2024 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment recommendations. Beginning in FFY 2026, the WRC will participate in a strategic activity to coordinate council actions and assist DVR with implementing the recommendations to meet agency goals.

We know the advisement of the council has a direct impact on our work. Countless success stories are emerging across the state, including just a few shared within this report. Qualified individuals seeking employment are being connected to specific industries that include health care, digital/information technology, construction, and manufacturing – helping bolster the state's economy as they find success and fulfillment in their own careers.

Thousands of businesses benefit from DVR services, and several were recognized in October 2025 during National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) for their ongoing commitment to hire and retain individuals with disabilities. More about our work with businesses across the state is addressed later in this report.

DVR experienced its highest caseload in 10 years, along with an increasing costs for goods and services needed to support job seekers. This surge in participation is occurring while we also navigate state and federal funding budget shortfalls. This surge in participation is occurring while we also navigate funding budget shortfalls. At the close of FFY 2025, the council was instrumental in providing feedback on how we modify our state plan and address our funding constraints in FFY 2026.

I believe DVR's ongoing accomplishments demonstrate an effective collaboration. The content of this report showcases our collective efforts. Working with this council over the last two years has been a privilege and I look forward to continuing this partnership in the years ahead.



Meredith Dressel
DVR Administrator



WISCONSIN REHABILITATION COUNCIL



VISION

People with disabilities will enjoy full equality of opportunity, complete integration in the life of our communities, and appropriate employment which fulfills each individual's needs and aspirations.

MISSION

To work on behalf of Wisconsin residents with disabilities to review, analyze, and advise DVR regarding the performance of its responsibilities in providing quality services to people with disabilities.



OBJECTIVES

BUILD PARTNERSHIPS among people with disabilities, providers of employment services, advocacy organizations, and other groups that can and should participate in the accomplishment of the council's mission and vision.

REACH OUT TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES throughout the state to create a true spirit of inclusion for every Wisconsinite, including an opportunity to contribute to the work of WRC.

HEAR AND RESPOND to the concerns and issues raised by people with disabilities, their advocates, and other concerned individuals so that the work of the Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council is as effective as possible and serves as a true catalyst for positive change.

FORGE A SPIRIT OF TRUST AND COOPERATION with the administration and DVR staff and advocacy organizations for people with disabilities to optimize the use of scarce resources for accomplishing the mission and vision and create conditions for acquiring additional resources.

The WRC performs several functions as outlined in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, amendments under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, and the WRC bylaws.

1. Review and analyze state-level data to advise DVR regarding performance in areas that impact the ability of individuals with disabilities to achieve employment outcomes using services under this title.
2. Advise and assist DVR in the preparation of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (State Plan).
3. Conduct a review of Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) hearing decisions and available data on consumer satisfaction with vocational rehabilitation services.
4. Work with DVR to prepare and submit an annual report to the governor and Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Commissioner on the status of vocational rehabilitation programs.
5. Coordinate the work of the WRC with the activities of other disability-related councils, including the State Rehabilitation Advisory Council, through dual memberships and information sharing.



COUNCIL MEMBERS

WRC is composed of 24 members who are appointed by the governor and serve staggered three-year terms, of which there are currently 19 seats filled. The WRC bylaws dictate a set number of seats for specific groups or demographics to ensure proper representation that can provide unique perspectives. Members include:

- Current or former recipients of vocational rehabilitation services.
- Disability advocacy group representatives.
- Parents, family members, guardians, or authorized representatives of people with disabilities.
- Business, industry, and labor representatives.
- A Department of Public Instruction representative.
- A Statewide Independent Living Council representative.
- The DVR Administrator, serving as an ex-officio member.

List of members:

- **Jacci Borchardt** – Shorewood, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities
- **Meredith Dressel** – Milwaukee, Director of Designated State Unit
- **Rachael Fellers** – Mequon, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities
- **Jenny Felty** – La Crosse, Community Rehabilitation Service Provider
- **Natalia Graf** – Arbor Vitae, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities
- **Lydia Hartlaub** - Shorewood, Client Assistance Program
- **Michael Jackson** – Milwaukee, Business, Industry, and Labor
- **Alan Kaltenberg** – Arlington, Business, Industry, and Labor
- **Liz Kennedy** – Prairie du Sac, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities
- **Kyle Kleist** – Menomonie, State Independent Living Council
- **Lindsey Kreitzman** – Waunakee, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities
- **Kathy Meisner** – Oconomowoc, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities
- **Dr. Oyinkansola Owonifari** – Brown Deer, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities
- **Alicia Reinhard** – Madison, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
- **Alexis Riggs** – Madison, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities
- **Dick Straub** – Brooklyn, Business, Industry, and Labor
- **Gadeen Taylor-Duke** – Hayward, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
- **Jolene Wanek** – Green Bay, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities
- **Markus Watts** - Brown Deer, Business, Industry, and Labor

The WRC is grateful for the individuals who commit their time and talents to serving Wisconsin. The following members served on the council and their terms ended during FFY 2025:

- **Megan Bisonette** – Hayward, Native American Rehabilitation Program
- **Jen Espinoza Forlenza** – Fitchburg, Client Assistance Program
- **Kevin Fortune** – Milwaukee, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities
- **Ann Franz** – Kaukauna, Council on Workforce Investment
- **Lori Karcher** – Milwaukee, Parent Training and Information Center
- **Dr. Debbie Lee** – Middleton, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities



COMMITTEES



EXECUTIVE

CHAIR: Richard Straub

MEMBERS: Jacci Borchardt, Liz Kennedy, Kyle Kleist, Kathy Meisner, Jolene Wanek, Rachael Fellers

PURPOSE: Coordinate activities of the full council, including identifying and prioritizing areas in which the council review may improve DVR program delivery, maintaining open communication and transparency to ensure the council is an effective resource for stakeholder oversight of DVR, and identifying and implementing methods to improve council operations.



POLICY REVIEW AND ADMINISTRATION

CHAIR: Kathy Meisner

MEMBERS: Jen Espinoza-Forlenza, Rachel Fellers, Jenny Felty, Gadeen Taylor-Duke, Jolene Wanek

PURPOSE: Devise methods for ensuring DVR's delivery of services and data collection are compliant with WIOA and federal reporting standards. The committee also reviews, analyzes, and provides input on the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services and stakeholder satisfaction with VR services.



COUNCIL ENGAGEMENT

CHAIR: Jacci Borchardt

MEMBERS: Lori Karcher, Liz Kennedy, Dr. Debbie Lee, Richard Straub

PURPOSE: Encourage WRC member engagement, solicit executive committee nominees, and recruit new members.



SERVICES TO BUSINESS

CHAIR: Jolene Wanek

MEMBERS: Megan Bisonette, Rachael Fellers, Jenny Felty, Natalia Graf, Michael Jackson, Alan Kaltenberg, Liz Kennedy, Dr. Oyinkansola Owonifari

PURPOSE: Ensure that DVR's services to businesses are delivered in a way that assists job seekers with disabilities to connect to employment.



PERFORMANCE MEASURES & QUALITY ASSURANCE

CHAIR: Kyle Kleist

MEMBERS: Alexis Riggs, Alicia Reinhard, Richard Straub, Jacci Borchardt, Jolene Wanek, Kathy Meisner, Lindsey Kreitzman, Jen Espinoza Forlenza

PURPOSE: Devise methods for ensuring DVR's delivery of services and data collection are compliant with WIOA and federal reporting standards. The committee also reviews, analyzes, and provides input on the effectiveness of VR services and stakeholder satisfaction with VR services.



DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (DVR)

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

DVR is a federal/state program that offers individualized services to eligible people with disabilities who want to work. The program also provides training and technical assistance to employers regarding disability employment issues.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law in 2014 and went into effect in July 2015. This legislation was designed to strengthen and improve the nation's public workforce system, help get Americans – including youth and those with significant barriers to employment – into high-quality jobs and careers, and help employers hire and retain skilled workers. Title IV of WIOA amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. DVR provides the consumer services required under Title IV.

Under WIOA, the WRC is required to meet quarterly and participate in the following activities related to DVR's provision of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services:

- Consult with DVR on the development, implementation, and revision of DVR policies and procedures.
- Collaborate with DVR staff and administration to annually develop, agree to, and review DVR goals and priorities.
- Work jointly with DVR to prepare and submit an annual progress report.

HOW DOES DVR PROVIDE SERVICES?

- Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs) identify employment goals and necessary rehabilitative services.
- IPEs are developed and co-signed by a licensed Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and the DVR consumer.
- DVR staff work in teams to assist consumers in achieving their employment goals.

WHAT DOES DVR DO?

- Provides employment services and counseling to people with disabilities.
- Administers or arranges for services to enable an individual to go to work.
- Offers training and technical assistance to employers regarding disability employment issues.

WHO DOES DVR SERVE?

- Individuals with disabilities in Wisconsin who face a significant barrier to employment.
- Wisconsin employers seeking qualified talent.

WHERE IS DVR LOCATED?

- DVR has offices in 17 comprehensive job centers and 18 additional service locations throughout Wisconsin.
- DVR staff can provide services in most locations within the state using remote access technology.

MISSION: To obtain, maintain, and improve employment for people with disabilities by working with vocational rehabilitation consumers, employers, and other partners.

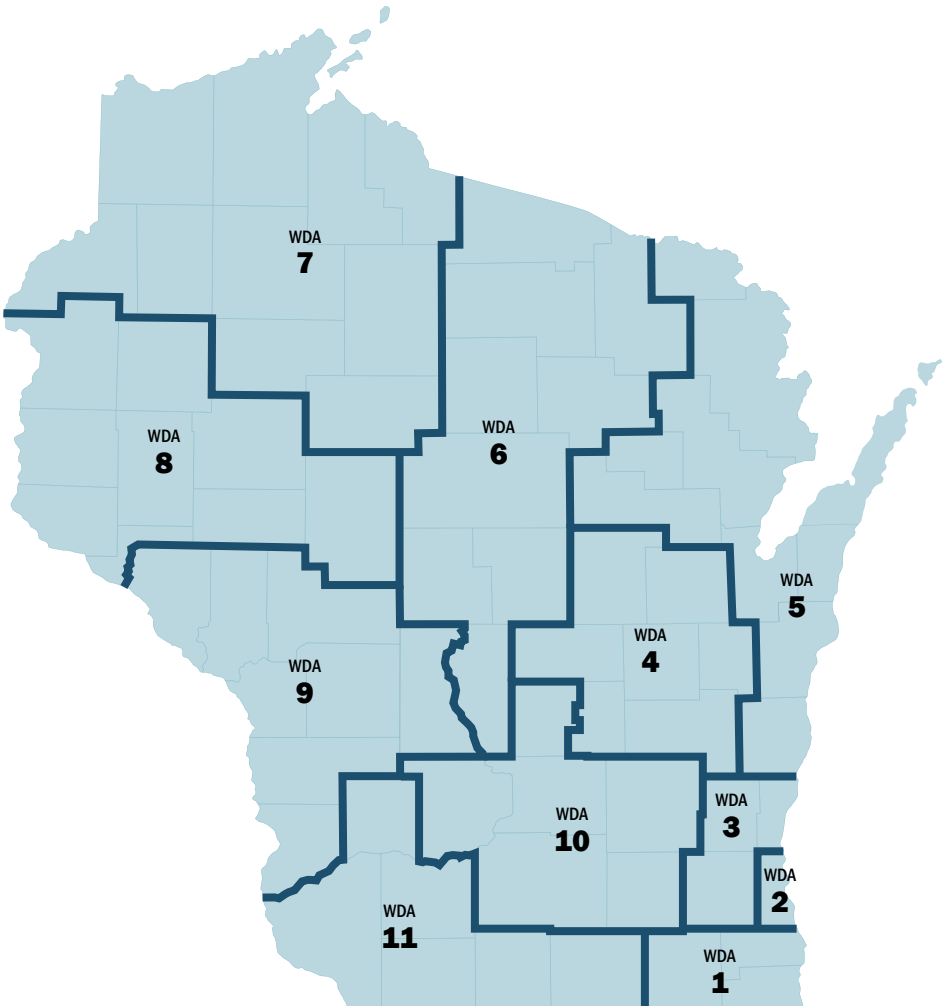


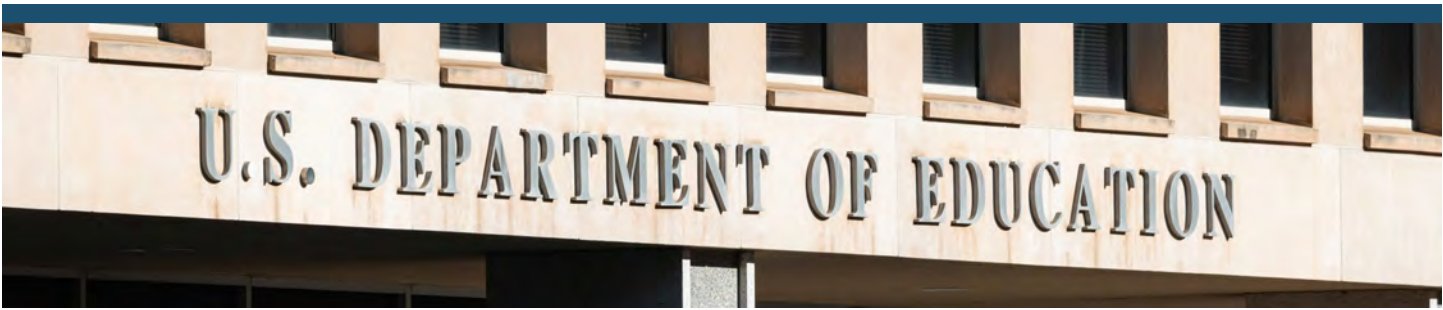
OFFICES ACROSS WISCONSIN

DVR is organized into 11 Workforce Development Areas (WDAs), each overseen by an area director. In total, DVR operates out of 35 field offices located throughout the WDAs based on area population. Below are the cities with DVR office locations, the WDA directors, and main WDA phone numbers.

WDA 1	Elkhorn, Kenosha, Racine	Susan Chandek 262-956-6935
WDA 2	Milwaukee, West Allis	Houston Jamison 608-405-4624
WDA 3	Waukesha, Pewaukee, West Bend	Amy May 262-956-6830
WDA 4	Fond Du Lac, Menasha, Oshkosh	Craig Wehner 920-930-6734
WDA 5	Green Bay, Marinette, Shawano, Sheboygan, Sturgeon Bay	Whitney Hostettler 920-404-6817
WDA 6	Rhineland, Stevens Point, Wausau, Wisconsin Rapids	Patricia Noland 715-261-8760
WDA 7	Ashland, Hayward, Ladysmith, Medford, Superior	Thomas Draghi 715-392-7896
WDA 8	Eau Claire, Menomonie, Rice Lake	Ashley Hinke 715-830-8115
WDA 9	La Crosse, Viroqua	Jennifer Hunn 608-901-5710
WDA 10	Baraboo, Beaver Dam, Jefferson, Madison (2), Portage	Jennifer Klein 608-242-4800
WDA 11	Dodgeville, Janesville, Richland Center	Andrea Simon 800-228-2648

**Area
Director**





IMPACT

DVR receives 78.7% of its funding from the U.S. Department of Education and a required 21.3% match from State of Wisconsin General Purpose Revenues.

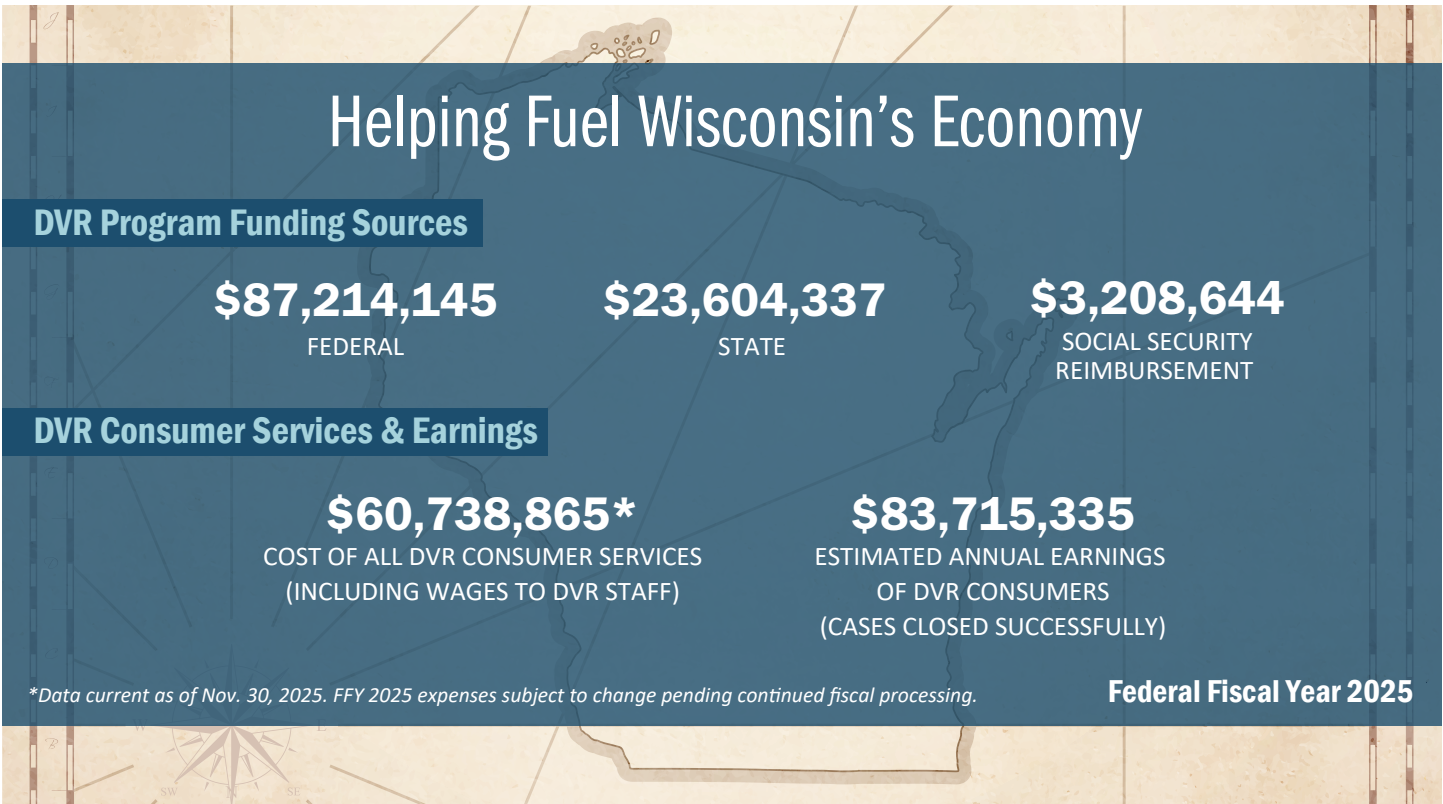
In addition, Wisconsin can apply for Social Security reimbursement dollars. These dollars are earned when DVR services help to place a consumer in a job that pays a high enough wage that the consumer no longer receives Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI). When this occurs, the Social Security Administration (SSA) reimburses DVR for the cost of case services provided to the consumer.

In FFY 2025, DVR received \$87,214,145 in federal funding and \$23,604,337 in state match. In addition to these primary funding sources, in FFY 2025 DVR received \$3,208,644 million in Social Security reimbursement dollars.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

DVR plays a key role in supporting and strengthening Wisconsin’s economy. In FFY 2025, DVR consumers whose cases were successfully closed earned an estimated \$83.7 million through work, enriching the state’s communities, economy, and workforce. This amount exceeded the total cost of all DVR consumer services, including staff wages, during the same period at \$60.7 million. This outcome demonstrates a strong return on Wisconsin’s continued investment in DVR programs.

Through its work, DVR successfully transitions Wisconsin residents with disabilities off federal programs such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI).



MISSION IN ACTION (SUCCESS STORY #1)

How DVR SERVICES OFFERED ONE MAN A CHANGE IN DIRECTION

Jack Brunslik had spent his career in the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) industry until a sudden, life-changing event led him in an entirely new direction.

In 2021, Jack experienced a stroke during a planned surgery. As he recovered, two more strokes followed, ultimately resulting in a spinal cord injury that left him with permanent paralysis from the waist down.

For Jack, and many others in similar situations, adapting to the physical limitations and challenges that come with such an injury can be overwhelming. When faced with such changes to both career and everyday life, reaching out for help can make a profound difference.

After learning about the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) through his long-term care agency, Inclusa, Jack reached out to DVR to explore new career possibilities.



With the help of DVR counselors and specialists, Jack applied for and received support through the [DVR Training Grant](#) and [Career Pathways Advancement \(CPA\) Initiative](#). The funding enabled him to pursue an educational degree and make necessary vehicle modifications, allowing him to drive again.

Jack, who lives in rural Vernon County, began his new educational journey in fall 2022 at Western Technical College. Thanks to DVR services and funding from a U.S. Department of Education Career Pathways Advancement (CPA) Initiative grant, Jack obtained his driver's license again and modified his vehicle to include a wheelchair lift and hand controls, allowing him to drive his van to attend classes in person.

"Jack ultimately decided upon a career path he had considered in the past – a degree in Architectural Technology that would allow him to work as a draftsman," said Lori Mohring, Jack's DVR Counselor.

Jack excelled in his studies and graduated with an associate degree in May 2024. After several months of working with an employment specialist, in August 2024 he began his new career as a draftsman with Cleary Building Corporation, where he remains successfully employed today.

This new career has also given Jack the opportunity to advocate for other individuals with disabilities. Drawing on his own experiences navigating physical challenges, Jack is in a unique position to design home and building modifications that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), improving accessibility for those with similar mobility limitations.

Jack is among the roughly 19,000 Wisconsin workers with disabilities receiving services from DVR at any given time. DVR offers a range of services, including training, internships, assistive technology, interviewing assistance, and on-the-job support across 35 locations statewide.

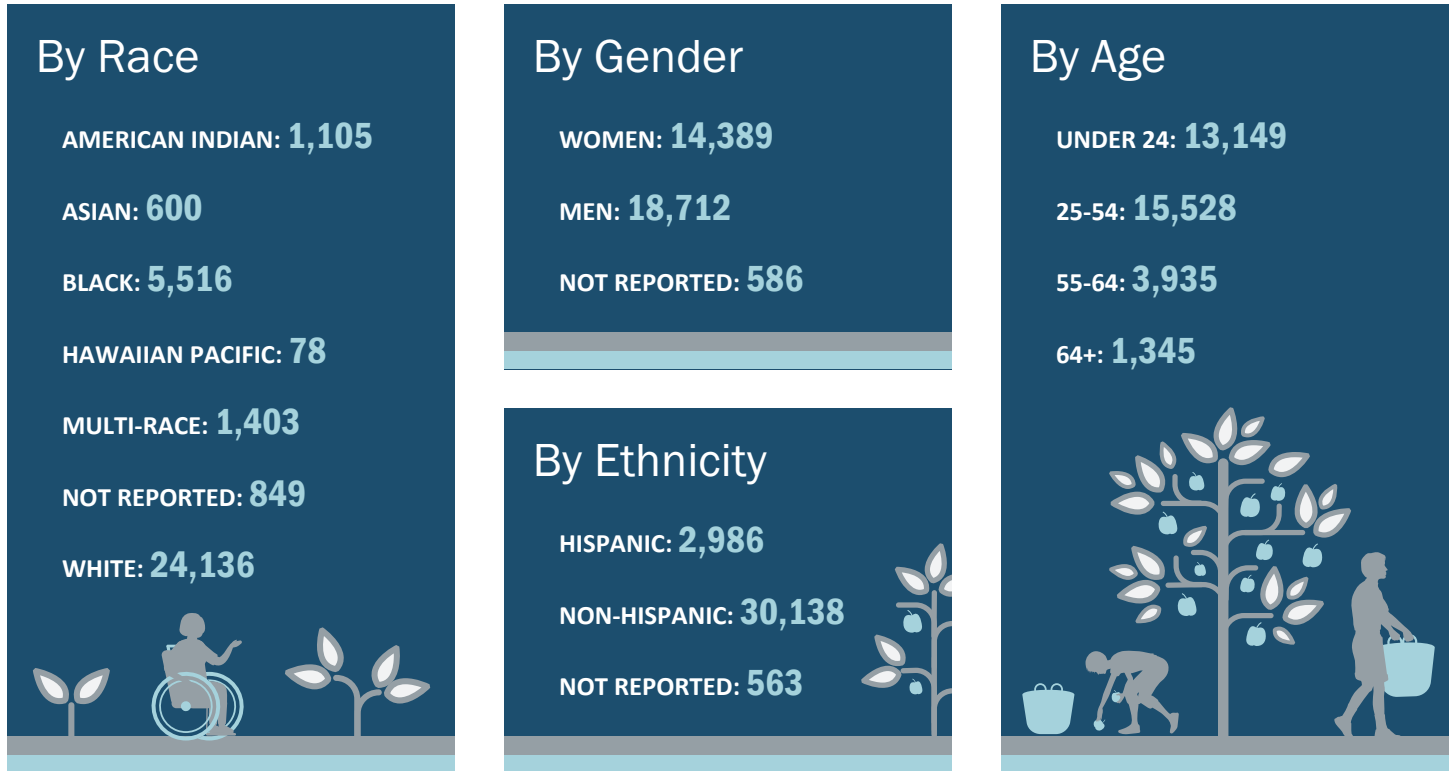
"After working with DVR, I was able to transform my career and my life," said Jack. "I am not typically a person who asks for assistance and working with this program helped me rethink my ways. I hope my story can help inspire someone else who may need similar services to reach out to DVR."



CONSUMER METRICS

DEMOGRAPHICS

In FFY 2025, DVR provided services and support to 33,687 individuals. These individuals received a variety of support and services through DVR offices around the state, with 3,429 successfully maintaining employment for at least 90 days while DVR tracked their progress. These individual cases were then successfully closed per DVR policy.



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



In FFY 2025, DVR continued to implement a strategic plan established in 2023, focusing on three key goals: addressing consumer inequities, building a diverse workforce, and fostering a positive work culture. The five-year plan resulted from a DVR staff survey, a review of DVR's consumer policies, and process and communication recommendations from Roadmap Research Global, which was contracted to assist in creating the plan.

DISABILITY TYPES

This page provides data on the primary disabilities of consumers who were determined eligible for DVR services in FFY 2025.

Data is tracked and maintained by DVR and provided to the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration under the U.S. Department of Education. When individuals apply for DVR services, they report their primary disability. A primary disability is determined by a diagnosis from a medical professional and establishes the primary barriers to employment.

In the table depicted below, the “Other” category includes disability types that may not fall into another category. The “Other Physical” category includes individuals with a primary impairment that is not listed, is a general physical debilitation such as fatigue and pain, or is a primary disability caused by a physical condition that is not listed elsewhere.



WISCONSIN CONSUMERS SERVED IN FFY 2025		
DISABILITY TYPE	TOTAL	PERCENT
ADHD	3,298	9.8%
AODA	450	1.3%
Autism	4,224	12.5%
Blind / Visual	648	1.9%
Brain Injuries	485	1.4%
Congenital Condition or Birth Injury	392	1.2%
Deaf / HH	1,139	3.4%
Eligibility Undetermined*	3,019	9.0%
Intellectual	3,330	9.9%
Learning Disabilities	2,110	6.3%
Mental Illness	6,625	19.7%
Orthopedic	3,108	9.2%
Other	2,440	7.2%
Other Physical	2,419	7.2%
Total	33,687	100%

*Includes individuals potentially eligible, eligibility not yet determined, or a closed case (prior to having an eligibility determined).



OUTCOMES

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) defines Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) as either part- or full-time work (including self-employment) in which an individual with a disability is paid at or above minimum wage, and located in an environment where the individual regularly interacts with people both with and without disabilities. In addition, the employee must have equal access to benefits and opportunities for advancement as peers who do not have disabilities.

In FFY 2025, **242 DVR consumers successfully maintained employment and transitioned off federal benefits**. This figure demonstrates the profound economic impact that DVR has not only on individual consumers, but on the State of Wisconsin as a whole.

The chart below shows FFY 2025 statistics by employment status category, where DVR consumers on average saw a four percent increase in hourly wages compared to 2024.

WISCONSIN CONSUMERS SERVED IN FFY 2025						
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	CONSUMERS	% OF PLACEMENT	AVERAGE HOURS**	AVERAGE WEEKLY EARNINGS**	AVERAGE HOURLY WAGE**	MEDIAN HOURLY WAGE
Competitive Integrated Employment	2,757	80.4%	27.42	\$529.96	\$17.81	\$15.25
Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program (BEP)	1	0.0%	14.00	\$210.00	\$15.00	\$15.00
Self-Employment (Except BEP)	46	1.3%	31.39	\$868.47	\$31.89	\$15.52
Supported Employment in Competitive Integrated Employment*	625	18.2%	13.24	\$173.82	\$12.51	\$12.50
Total	3,429	100%	24.89	\$469.50	\$17.04	\$15.00

*Supported employment – Competitive integrated employment, including customized employment, or employment in an integrated work setting in which an individual with a most significant disability, including a youth with a most significant disability, is working on a short-term basis toward competitive integrated employment that is individualized, and customized, consistent with the unique strengths, abilities, interests, and informed choice of the individual, including with ongoing support services for individuals with the most significant disabilities. – Code of Federal Regulations § 361.5 Applicable definitions.

**The total in these columns is the overall total average across all consumers, and not an average of the averages.

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) was created by Congress with the enactment of the Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936. The program was intended to enhance employment opportunities for trained, licensed blind persons. The law was subsequently amended in 1954 and again in 1974 to ultimately ensure blind individuals receive priority in the operation of vending facilities, which included cafeterias, snack bars, and automatic vending machines, that are on federal property.

DVR oversees the BEP program in Wisconsin, which is the state's priority program offering vending services in state and federally owned or leased facilities. The program provides snack and beverages vending services to nearly 120 locations throughout Wisconsin, which includes five, fresh food micro-market locations. Currently, the program supports 12 licensed BEP entrepreneurs who own and maintain independent vending companies around the state.



MISSION IN ACTION (SUCCESS STORY #2)

INTERN TO EMPLOYEE: CELEBRATING SUCCESS WITH PROJECT SEARCH

Central Wisconsin teen Rapids Khang found an opportunity true to his name at Aspirus Wisconsin Rapids Hospital through Project SEARCH.

Rapids is a typical 19-year-old; he enjoys working out, scrolling Netflix and YouTube, and hanging out with his friends. Like many teens and adults, he also lives with a learning disability. This year, he was one of 11 students graduating from [Project SEARCH](#) at Aspirus Wisconsin Rapids Hospital, one of 29 Wisconsin businesses hosting the program during the 2024-25 school year.

“Initially I heard about Project SEARCH through the teachers at my high school,” said Rapids. “The Project SEARCH instructor came over to our school and gave a presentation. My teachers assisted me with completing the application and getting me to skills day.”

Project SEARCH is a nine-month program administered in Wisconsin by the Department of Workforce Development’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). The program provides students with disabilities hands-on job training through workplace rotations at local businesses. Interns receive classroom instruction from local school districts and personalized support from disability service providers. DVR offers job search assistance and provides individualized support to participants both during the program and after graduation.

After being accepted into the Project SEARCH program, Rapids completed two job rotations at Aspirus Wisconsin Rapids. His first was in the food and nutrition division, where he took inventory and stocked the hospital’s kitchens, cleaned dishes, and prepped meals for home delivery.

“I learned there are many tasks involved in working in this department and I liked that a lot,” said Rapids. “I enjoy being busy and I was eager to learn more about the kitchen and its duties. I was also able to work with a former Project SEARCH intern, too, in this department. I think it motivated me because I was able to see what he has accomplished, and I wanted to be able to do that as well.”

His second job rotation proved to be the most impactful, with the internship eventually turning into a permanent role. “The thing I am most proud of in applying to Project SEARCH is obtaining my current position at the hospital.”

Rapids was recently hired as a part-time dietary aide at Aspirus. His responsibilities include delivering food trays to patient care floors, helping with food prep, assembling home-delivery meals, retrieving trays from patients, and dishwashing.

“I enjoy helping in all areas,” he said. “My instructor and job coaches helped a lot, and I feel my coworkers in the kitchen were very supportive. They all encouraged me to apply to my current position.”

This year marks a dual milestone for both Rapids and his employer. Not only has Rapids reached a significant personal goal with his new job, but Aspirus Wisconsin Rapids Hospital is celebrating their tenth anniversary as a Project SEARCH host site.

“The class of 2025 is our tenth graduating class from the Aspirus Wisconsin Rapids Project SEARCH program,” said Jane Walczak,

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system manager of organizational learning and development at Aspirus Wisconsin Rapids Hospital. “I am so proud to work for an organization that supports such a valuable program.”

Walczak remembers the immediate impact of Project SEARCH when the hospital hosted its first group of interns a decade ago. Staff embraced the program wholeheartedly, taking pride in mentoring interns and forming strong connections with them.

“I truly believe that the positive impact the Project SEARCH program has for the interns is equaled by the positive impact it has on our staff and our culture,” said Walczak. “For Aspirus, Project SEARCH provides supporting fuel to our value of compassion and our mission to help strengthen our communities.”

She is particularly proud of Rapids and his growth over the past year.

“Rapids is a great example of the progression an intern can make as a participant in the Project SEARCH program,” said Walczak. “Interns come in very shy, and some with little or no prior work experience. During the school year, the interns work side-by-side with their job coach, instructor, and agency staff and are given opportunities to practice and learn job skills in an environment where they feel comfortable and safe to try new skills.”

Rapids’ hard work and dedication have also caught the attention of hospital leadership.

“More than one leader made mention on how impressed they were with Rapids and his willingness to jump in to help with different tasks with no hesitation – and at times, without even an ask,” said Walczak. “I have seen considerable growth in the confidence Rapids demonstrates as he works and communicates with our employees and customers. I am proud of Rapids as a Project SEARCH intern and now as an employee of Aspirus.”

Project SEARCH teaches meaningful, transferable job skills while building a pathway to competitive, integrated employment. Interns work alongside their peers without disabilities, ensuring real-world experience and full inclusion in the workplace. The program benefits not only the interns, but also the businesses that host them – and the broader community – by connecting local employers with skilled, motivated job seekers who are ready to put their talents to work.

[Project SEARCH](#) was developed in 1996 at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center and has since grown to more than 750 sites worldwide. Wisconsin’s Project SEARCH program began in 2008 with a single site located in Madison and has since expanded to 29 sites across the state.

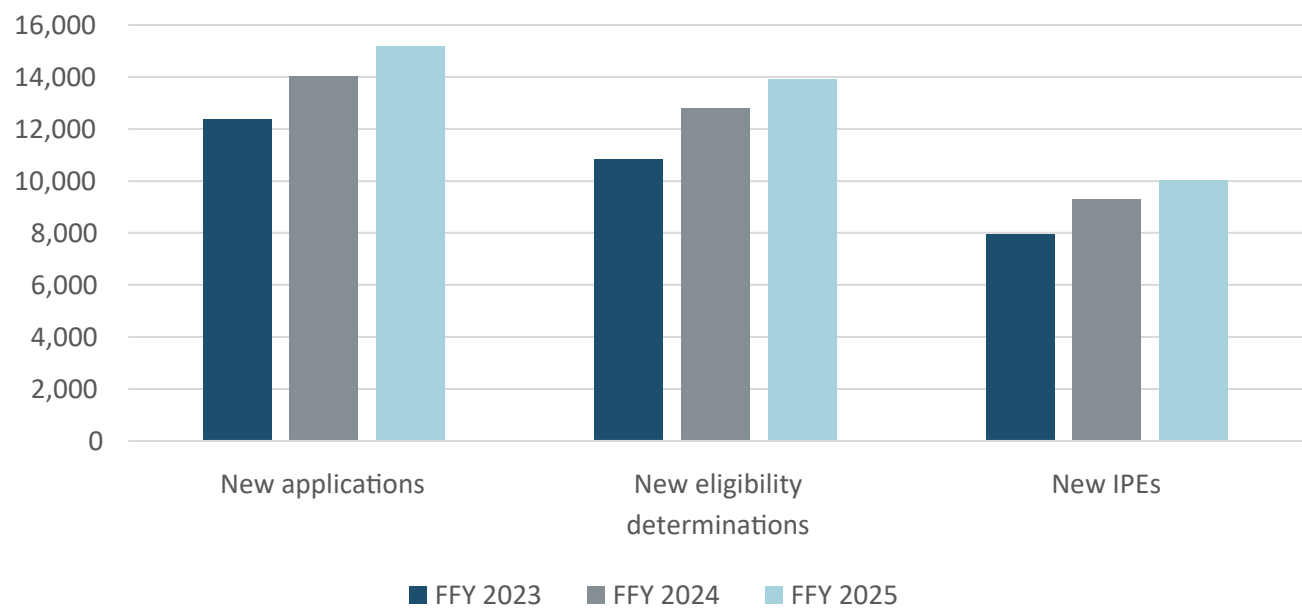


PERFORMANCE METRICS

Throughout FFY 2025, DVR engaged with a total of 33,687 Wisconsin residents. Individuals included in this figure participated in at least one activity with DVR over the course of the year, with 13,863 of these individuals found eligible for DVR services. Engagement activities with DVR include application for services, eligibility determination, Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) development, active DVR services, or case closure, either through successful community employment or informed choice.

DVR ENGAGEMENT BY ACTIVITY – FFY 2023-2025

Number of new DVR applications, eligibility determinations, and IPEs during each federal fiscal year since 2023.



JOB TYPES OBTAINED BY DVR CONSUMERS

The table below shows the types of jobs obtained by the 3,429 DVR consumers who successfully achieved their employment goal in FFY 2025.

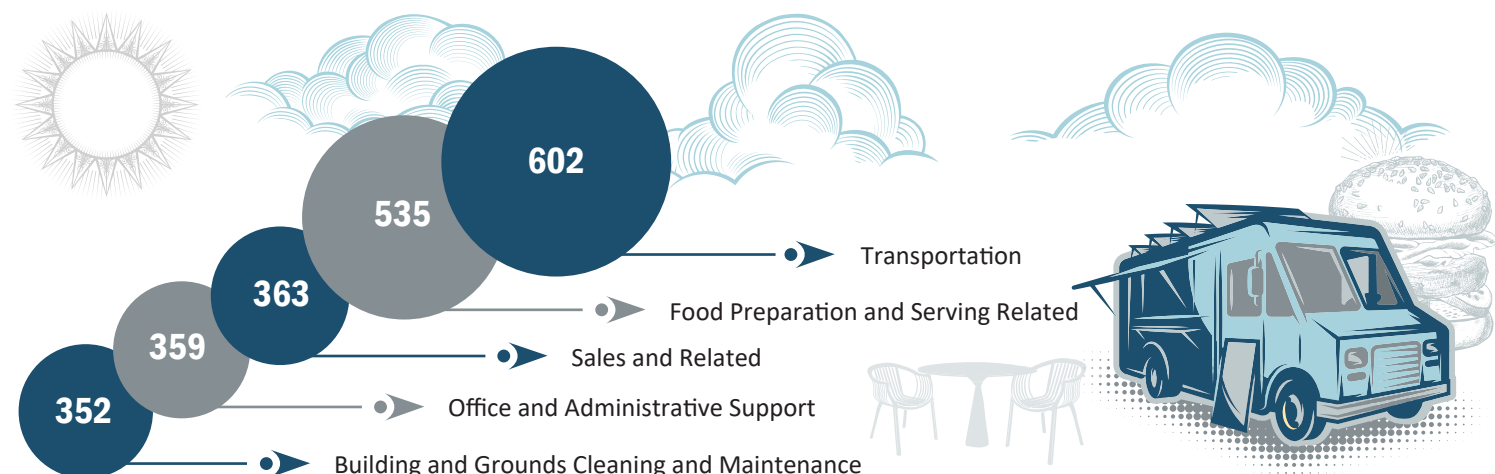
JOB TYPES

Architecture and Engineering	20
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	32
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	352
Business and Financial Operations	47
Community and Social Service	83
Computer and Mathematical	45
Construction and Extraction	37
Education, Training, and Library	96
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	22
Food Preparation and Serving Related	535
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	80
Healthcare Support	116
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	65
Legal	6
Life, Physical, and Social Science	15
Management	92
Military	1
Office and Administrative Support	359
Personal Care and Service	147
Production	293
Protective Service	21
Sales and Related	363
Transportation and Material Moving	602
Total	3,429



TOP 5 CONSUMER JOB TYPES

Number of successfully employed DVR consumers in the five most common industries, FFY2025:



CONSUMER CASE SERVICE EXPENDITURES

The table below shows the total cost of DVR services for federal fiscal years 2024 and 2025. These expenditures reflect the services required to assist DVR consumers based on their individual needs and employment goals.

	FFY 2024	FFY 2025**
Assessment	\$3,699,195	\$3,431,592
Benefits Analysis	\$2,545,600	\$2,802,400
College/University Training	\$4,728,673	\$6,249,225***
Disability Skills Training	\$412,101	\$350,909
Eligibility/OOS Assessment	\$3,370,910	\$3,878,266
Interpreter/Note-Taker for the Deaf	\$243,014	\$270,327
Job Development	\$11,878,481	\$14,024,424
Low Vision Aid/Adjustment Services	\$299,114	\$294,752
Maintenance	\$945,334	\$1,119,790
Occupational/Vocational Training	\$483,817	\$591,896
On-the-Job Supports	\$6,708,620	\$7,146,836
Other Services*	\$775,117	\$810,852
Personal Assistance	\$93,866	\$86,095
Rehabilitation Technology	\$4,366,164	\$4,107,352
Restoration	\$278,080	\$73,343
Services/Family Members	\$35,494	\$6,874
Small Business Services	\$66,770	\$100,265
State LTE	\$4,375	\$3,754
Supported Employment	\$10,201,088	\$9,987,656
Temporary Work	\$6,659,994	\$7,348,388
Training	\$4,940,799	\$5,521,052
Transportation	\$2,661,016	\$2,628,931
Work-Related Materials/Tools	\$317,078	\$362,311
Youth On-the-Job Training	\$25,164	\$25,301
Total	\$65,739,865	\$71,222,592

*Other services include all other vocational rehabilitation services that cannot be recorded elsewhere such as background checks (following IPEs), BEP initial stocks and supplies, occupational license fees (e.g., CDL, RN, LPC) and occupational license testing fees that are excluded in the cost of training, computers for job development training, etc.

**Data current as of Nov. 30, 2025. FFY 2025 expenses subject to change pending continued fiscal processing.

***DVR provided training grants to 1,627 consumers in FFY 2025 to further their education at a four-year university or college, technical or junior college, or obtain a graduate or doctorate-level credential.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

In FFY 2025, DVR spent over \$16 million on Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) statewide for 3,852 student consumers, ages 14 to 21.

PRE-ETS CATEGORY	2024 SPENDING	2025 SPENDING*
Work-based learning	\$9,316,239	\$9,906,059
Job-exploration counseling	\$922,847	\$870,013
Workplace readiness training	\$3,430,183	\$3,538,806
Self-advocacy training	\$248,687	\$172,277
Post-secondary counseling	\$91,139	\$75,238
In-house Pre-ETS services	\$1,554,093	\$1,617,684
STATEWIDE TOTAL	\$15,563,189	\$16,180,077



*Data current as of Nov. 30, 2025. FFY 2025 expenses subject to change pending continued fiscal processing.

MISSION IN ACTION (SUCCESS STORY #3)

VIRGINIA'S JOURNEY TO BECOMING A 988 COUNSELOR

One Brown County woman's journey from struggling student to professional counselor is a powerful example of how support, resilience, and the right resources can change a life.

Virginia Rodriguez first connected with the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) in 2018 while battling severe anxiety and depression. Then a high school student, she often found herself overwhelmed by daily tasks, which sometimes led to panic attacks.

As a first step toward healing, Virginia reached out to a therapist. With professional support, she learned coping mechanisms and strategies to manage her symptoms and began to regain a sense of hope. Despite her mental health challenges, she also felt a strong desire to pursue higher education.

"When I first heard of DVR in high school, I thought I would only ever need it to help me afford college," Virginia said. "And as a lot of 18-year-olds naively do, I thought I would know exactly what to do with my life after those four years and would never need any more help from anyone."

With encouragement from her DVR vocational rehabilitation counselor, Nicole Vike, Virginia applied for a [DVR Training Grant](#) and the [Career Pathways Advancement Initiative](#). Funds from these DVR programs helped her enroll at St. Norbert College in August 2019. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in social work in May 2023, a field she had long been passionate about and through which she hoped to give back to her community.

Virginia's journey didn't stop there.

After graduation, while continuing to work a fast-food job to make ends meet, she began searching for a role in social work. With support from [VaryAbility, LLC](#), a local job developer from Green Bay, Virginia received help with job applications, interview preparation, and job leads in her chosen field.

Following months of job searching, Virginia accepted a full-time position as a crisis counselor with 988 Wisconsin Lifeline, the in-state agency operated by [Family Services of Northeast Wisconsin](#). She completed four weeks of crisis intervention training and jumped into service. Today, she works with clients during some of their most vulnerable moments—helping to de-escalate emotional crises, activate problem-solving strategies, and connect individuals with ongoing care. Virginia's intervention proves critical to bridging the gap between immediate needs and long-term treatment.



"I love my job very much... my team is very supportive, kind, and welcoming," said Virginia. "I've never felt as supported and cared-for in a work environment as I do with 988, and I am very thankful to be in this role."

Virginia's story is a testament to the importance of mental health awareness. By openly sharing her experience, she helps to reduce the stigma around mental illness and encourages others to seek the help they need. Her journey is a reminder that it's okay to not be okay, and that no one has to face their struggles alone.

"I will always be grateful for the ways you [DVR] encouraged me to strive for bigger and greater things in my life," Virginia said. "I look back on my involvement with DVR as one of the only consistent sources of accountability and encouragement I had. Thank you for believing in my ability to take care of myself when not many other people did."

BUSINESS SERVICES

DVR is committed to helping people with disabilities find a job, keep a job, and get a better job. DVR's Business Services Consultants (BSCs) are strategically located within each WDA across the state, ready to work with employers who are seeking new employees and helping create workplaces that are inclusive and supportive of people of all abilities. In FFY 2025, DVR BSCs connected with over 3,200 Wisconsin employers, providing them with nearly 9,000 individual services. BSCs can assist businesses in many ways:

- Access workforce planning resources.
- Educate employers with relevant labor market information.
- Recruit qualified workers with disabilities.
- Build staff diversity through DVR's broad pool of skilled job candidates.
- Retain well-trained and productive employees.

2024-2025 HIGHLIGHTS

The BSC team began working with Walmart in late 2024 to begin a training for its Wisconsin-based store leadership to understand and support both coworkers and customers on the autism spectrum. To meet Walmart's training objectives, the BSC team tailored an existing 'Windmills' curriculum – an interactive disability training program – and brought in local experts in autism services from the SSM Health Treffert Center to contribute. The training ultimately helped educate more than 100 Walmart leaders across Wisconsin and parts of Illinois, Michigan and Minnesota. The curriculum consisted of general autism education, practical information on job adjustments for associates, reasonable accommodations, and a discussion of resources centered around potential needs of individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

The BSCs also partnered with SSM Health and Sodexo on two training sessions titled "Moving Forward Together." The participants shared information about careers in healthcare and offered an in-depth view of the partnership between SSM Health and Sodexo. DVR staff and service providers who work directly with job seekers exploring career opportunities attended the session and took advantage of two opportunities to learn more about the companies and career paths available. This session was followed by a "hiring series" where, over a month's time, DVR's Business Services contacted both organizations to focus on connecting with DVR consumers who applied for positions within SSM Health facilities.

NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

October 2024 marked the 79th anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, otherwise referred to as NDEAM. Throughout FFY 2025, DVR's team of BSCs connected with dozens of businesses across the state helping educate and connect them with a diverse, talented pool of candidates to develop an inclusive workplace culture.



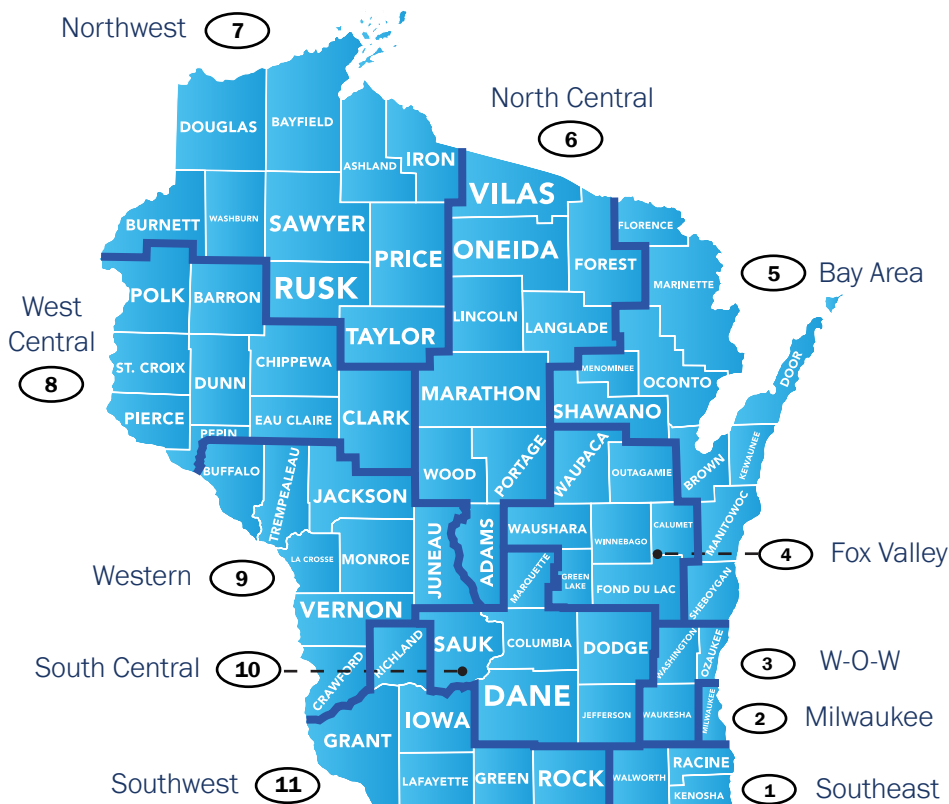


CONNECT WITH YOUR LOCAL BSC

Employers who would like help recruiting and retaining employees can contact their local BSC to set up a no-cost meeting to begin discussing how DVR can help attract and retain talented employees.

WDA 1	Shaun Lukas	shaun.lukas@dwd.wi.gov	262-270-8518
WDA 2	Sameer Bhajji	sameer.bhajji@dwd.wi.gov	414-458-8072
	Stephanie Narciso Avelino	stephanie.narcisoavelino1@dwd.wi.gov	414-227-4370
WDA 3	Brandi Hernandez	brandi.hernandez@dwd.wi.gov	414-250-6506
WDA 4	Nicole Greetan	nicole.greetan@dwd.wi.gov	920-312-6037
WDA 5	Lynn Hardginski	lynn.hardginski@dwd.wi.gov	262-977-1021
WDA 6	Mallory Bryan	mallory.bryan@dwd.wi.gov	715-907-2580
WDA 7	Dawn Stocks	dawn.stocks@dwd.wi.gov	715-415-2712
WDA 8	Tara Burns	taram.burns@dwd.wi.gov	715-931-7394
WDA 9	Amy Studden	amy.studden@dwd.wi.gov	608-799-6308
WDA 10	Nathan Clemons	nathan.clemons@dwd.wi.gov	608-228-0227
WDA 11	Milo Luna	ismael.luna@dwd.wi.gov	608-931-0765

**DVR
Business
Services
Consultants**



BECOME A WRC MEMBER

HOW DO I JOIN?

Members of the council are appointed by the governor. The council may forward recommendations to the governor after soliciting recommendations from organizations representing the broad range of individuals with disabilities. In selecting members, the governor shall consider, to the greatest extent practicable, representation of minority populations on the council.

WHAT QUALIFICATIONS DO I NEED?

A majority of council members shall be persons who are:

1. Individuals with disabilities; and
2. Not employed by the DWD.

HOW LONG CAN I SERVE?

1. Each member of the council shall be appointed for a term of no more than three years and may serve no more than two consecutive terms.
2. A member appointed to fill a vacancy occurring prior to the end of the term for which a predecessor was appointed shall be appointed for the remainder of the predecessor's term.
3. The terms of service of the members initially appointed must be for varied numbers of years to ensure terms expire on a staggered basis.

WHERE DO I BEGIN?

To learn more about WRC, and see which seats to apply for, visit the WRC website at dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/partners/wrc/members.htm. Send a resume and cover letter expressing your interest in joining the council to dvrwirehabcouncil@dwd.wisconsin.gov.

CONTACT WRC

The WRC welcomes and appreciates input from the public, using feedback to advise DVR and direct the council's focus. If you have any questions or comments about this report or WRC's work, email WRC at: dvrwirehabcouncil@dwd.wisconsin.gov.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

VR Services For Job Seekers With Disabilities - <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/job-seekers>

DVR Services For Business - <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/business>

Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council - <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/partners/wrc>

Workforce Innovation And Opportunities Act - <https://doleta.gov/wioa>

Rehabilitation Services Administration - <https://rsa.ed.gov>

National Coalition Of State Rehabilitation Councils - <https://ncsrc.net>



Federal Funding Disclosure (Stevens Amendment)

The Stevens Amendment is an appropriations provision that requires U.S. Department of Education grant recipients to acknowledge federal funding when publicly communicating any projects or programs. This requirement to reveal the costs financed with federal funds promotes transparency and accountability and ensures any federally funded research and work are properly credited.

The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7% of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2025 (FFY 2025), the total amount of grant funds awarded were \$87,214,145, including \$15,522,975 reserved for Pre-Employment Transition Services. The remaining 21.3% (\$23,604,337) of the costs were funded by Wisconsin state appropriations.

Additional U.S. Department of Education program grants include:

Career Pathways: *The Career Pathways Program is supported by the U.S. Department of Education. A total of 100% (\$20,415,000) of the Career Pathways Program is financed with federal funds.*

Supported Employment – Adults with Disabilities: *Supported Employment Services for Adults with Disabilities are funded by the U.S. Department of Education. A total of 100% (\$226,734.50) of Supported Employment Services for Adults with Disabilities are financed with federal funds.*

Supported Employment – Youth with Disabilities: *Supported Employment Services for Youth with Disabilities are funded by the U.S. Department of Education. A total of 90% (\$226,734.50) of Supported Employment Services for Youth with Disabilities are financed with federal funds, and 10% is funded by other sources.*



Vocational Rehabilitation

