

# WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**



**2021  
ANNUAL REPORT**





**STATE OF WISCONSIN**  
 **DWD**  
Department of Workforce Development

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Dec. 30, 2021

The Honorable Tony Evers  
Office of the Governor  
115 East, State Capitol Building  
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Tony Evers:

It is my pleasure to present the Department of Workforce Development's (DWD) annual report highlighting the agency's many accomplishments this past year. During 2021, DWD's mission to efficiently deliver effective and inclusive services to meet Wisconsin's diverse workforce needs proved more important than ever.

Even as the COVID-19 pandemic caused continued disruption, Wisconsin's economy transitioned from a period of record-high unemployment in 2020 to a tie for record-low unemployment of 3.0% in November 2021. Throughout this remarkable bounce back, DWD has continued to advocate for the protection and economic advancement of all Wisconsin workers, employers, and job seekers.

DWD's critical work during 2021 included:

- ◆ **Implementation of the Evers Administration's historic \$130 million Workforce Solutions Initiative, including the award of grants for its three programs.** Together, the Worker Advancement Initiative, Workforce Innovation Grants (in partnership with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation), and the Worker Connection Program will deliver regional solutions to address longstanding labor force challenges and issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ◆ **Unemployment Insurance system modernization.** DWD contracted with Madison-based Flexion Inc. to improve customer service through introduction of phased software solutions. The contract involves integration of off-the-shelf software and cloud-based solutions along with significant custom software development.
- ◆ **Securing a \$14 million career pathways grant.** The five-year, \$14 million grant from the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration will assist up to 500 people with disabilities in gaining new skills and industry-recognized credentials for high-growth occupations in health care, manufacturing, digital technology, and construction.
- ◆ **Expanding career readiness and training opportunities in correctional facilities.** In 2021, DWD opened new job labs in eight correctional institutions including Robert E. Ellsworth Correctional Center, Chippewa Valley Correctional Treatment Center, Prairie du Chien Correctional Institution, New Lisbon Correctional Institution, Racine Youthful Offender Correctional Facility, Jackson Correctional Institution, Racine Correctional Institution, and Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution.
- ◆ **Continued success with apprenticeship programs.** During 2021, the number of Active Registered Apprentices increased to 14,225 while the number of participating employers grew to 2,847. The Youth Apprenticeship Program continued to see steady enrollment.
- ◆ **Expanding virtual training workshops.** As part of its efforts to promote safety and encourage rehabilitation and reemployment for injured workers, the department expanded its online training workshops. The virtual format allowed the department to reach more people than ever, with more than 200 registrants for many of the sessions.
- ◆ **Full implementation of online hearings and mediations.** By the end of the first quarter in 2021, a new process for conducting equal rights hearings and mediations via an online video conferencing platform had restored pre-pandemic efficiencies.

Wisconsin is at a turning point in history, a time when tightening labor markets are pushing unemployment to record lows and employers are in a global race for talent. While Wisconsin is not alone in facing these challenges, DWD's innovative responses are building collaboration among employers, workers, government agencies, and educational institutions to ensure the state's workforce programs meet current and future needs.

Sincerely,



Secretary-designee, Amy Pechacek  
Department of Workforce Development

## SECRETARY'S OFFICE OVERVIEW

The Office of the Secretary oversees the Department of Workforce Development (DWD), which efficiently delivers innovative, impactful, and inclusive programming to meet Wisconsin's diverse workforce needs, and advocates for the protection and economic advancement of all Wisconsin workers, employers, and job seekers. DWD is responsible for the state's employment and training services, including job centers; job training and placement services provided in cooperation with private sector employers; apprenticeship programs; and employment-related services for people with disabilities. The Department oversees several other programs, including Unemployment Insurance and Worker's Compensation programs, and is responsible for adjudicating cases involving employment discrimination, housing discrimination, and labor law. The Department also analyzes and distributes labor market information.

## OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

The Office of Legislative Affairs is the agency's primary contact for the state's 132 legislators, as well as Wisconsin's Congressional delegation. The office includes a Legislative Liaison and Constituent Services Liaison who respond to legislative inquiries made on behalf of Wisconsin's residents. The office tracks legislation that has the potential to impact the agency and meets with lawmakers and other stakeholders to educate them on DWD's mission and core services.

## OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

The Office of Communications shares Department information and ensures the Department responds to requests for information from the news media in an accurate, timely, and comprehensive fashion. The office also works with each of the divisions to build awareness of the many programs, innovations, achievements, and issues related to DWD.

## OFFICE OF CHIEF LEGAL COUNSEL

The Office of Legal Counsel provides legal advice to the Office of the Secretary and the Department's program managers, acts as the legal custodian for public records purposes, oversees rulemaking for the Department, supervises attorneys in the Office of Chief Legal Counsel and the director of Office of Integrity and Accountability, represents the Department before administrative tribunals, and acts as Department's litigation contact with the Department of Justice.

## OFFICE OF PROGRAM INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Office of Integrity and Accountability is responsible for evaluating the agency's resources to ensure they are being used efficiently, effectively, and appropriately for the advancement of the agency's mission and objectives. OIA conducts internal and external review activities and furnishes DWD with high quality analyses, appraisals, and recommendations.

## MISSION

DWD efficiently delivers effective and inclusive services to meet Wisconsin's diverse workforce needs, and advocates for the protection and economic advancement of all Wisconsin workers, employers, and job seekers.

## VISION

DWD envisions a thriving Wisconsin economy in which:

- ▶ All workers are treated fairly, with dignity and respect;
- ▶ Employers, government, educational institutions, and workers collaborate to ensure workforce programs meet current and future needs; and
- ▶ Every job provides the wages and benefits necessary to support workers' basic needs, invest in their future, and actively engage with their families and communities.

## **MISSION**

Provide strategic vision, leadership, and solutions with our business partners to empower clients and customers.

## **Administrative Services**

### **OVERVIEW**

The Administrative Services Division (ASD) provides management and program support to DWD's divisions, including budget, facilities, finance, information technology, purchasing and procurement, lean government, project management services and solutions, and incident management and continuity of operations. In addition, ASD provides IT support to the Labor & Industry Review Commission, batch monitoring support to the State of Wisconsin Investment Board, and certain statewide programs administered by the Department of Health Services and the Department of Children and Families. Additionally, ASD works closely with the Department of Administration (DOA) and the Division of Personnel Management (DPM) in the delivery of human resource services to the department.

ASD consists of five bureaus and one office:

- ◆ Enterprise Solutions
- ◆ Finance
- ◆ General Services
- ◆ Information Technology
- ◆ Procurement and Information Management
- ◆ Office of Policy and Budget

### **KEY METRICS**

- ◆ Completed 79 fiscal notes for legislative bills and Legislative Reference Bureau drafts.
- ◆ Developed and submitted Agency's Biennial Budget Request.
- ◆ Processed 19,354 vouchers for suppliers, subrecipients, and benefit payments during this period.
- ◆ Prepared monthly COVID trackers that were submitted to DOA to report expenditures incurred as the result of the pandemic. DWD was reimbursed \$88 million in Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) for expenditures incurred between March 2020 and June 2021.

### **UNLOCKING WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES**

In 2021, ASD deployed Business Intelligence solutions by implementing numerous internal and public-facing dashboards and various forecasting and predictive modeling tools. With support from the Workforce Data Quality Initiative, ASD staff also completed development of the Longitudinal Workforce Database, an enterprise research and analytics tool that provides information on how individuals are being served through multiple programs in different systems.



## **INCREASING WORKER PROTECTIONS AND RIGHTS**

In coordination with DWD's Equal Rights Division, ASD developed and deployed the SAFE Employers system which helps employers allow employees subject to domestic abuse or sexual violence seek needed assistance without fear of adverse job consequences.

## **IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE**

This year, to assist DWD staff in navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, ASD implemented a peer support program. To date, about 50 staff provided peer support, assisting with approximately 250 incidents. To retain employees and boost morale, ASD also expanded and redesigned its Employee Engagement (EE) program. Each division within DWD now has an EE liaison to support employee engagement and workplace satisfaction. Another staff engagement activity developed during the pandemic was a weekly communication called the Wellness Weekly, which covers well-being topics including from physical, mental, and emotional health.

Other ASD customer service improvements in 2021 included:

- ▶ Securing and relocating office space across the state to enhance employment and training and vocational rehabilitation outreach services to better serve consumers and achieve cost savings.
- ▶ Developing the Request for Information (RFI), Request for Proposal (RFP), and contract development for the UI Modernization project, a \$16 million investment for the Unemployment Insurance program to replace the antiquated mainframe platform.
- ▶ Redesigning and modernizing the DWD WorkWeb to make the site more informative and easier for employees to locate information and topics.
- ▶ Managing DWD forms compliance with Section 508, which requires agencies to ensure materials are accessible for people with disabilities.
- ▶ Developing new functional Retention Disposition Authorizations (RDA) for UI call data and call recordings.

## **DEVELOPING DWD CAREER PATHWAYS**

ASD staff coordinated an internal career pathways strategy for DWD staff to advance their government careers. Professional development opportunities included Careers, Coffee & Conversation and Moving Up, Down and Around in State Government. ASD also led a continuous improvement event to streamline the DWD hiring process and created a mentorship program that was introduced in the fall of 2021.

In 2020 when the former Aspiring Leaders Training was halted due to the pandemic, ASD introduced a new leadership development program. Six live and instructor-led courses were conducted virtually in partnership with UW-Continuing Studies. In total, 181 participants completed the courses.

## **OPERATING EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY WHILE ENHANCING PROGRAM INTEGRITY**

In 2021, ASD reconciled DWD's 1,655.55 full time equivalent (FTE) positions and developed base funding requests for 53 appropriations for the 21-23 Biennial Budget Agency Request. ASD also modeled a 5% reduction in operations as required under 2015 Act 201 and a base budget review report as required under 2017 Act 212 and submitted these items with submission of the 21-23 Biennial Budget Request.

ADS project managers were deployed to UI to manage the Google projects for recharging, doc AI (artificial intelligence), reducing the UI backlog, and security hardening. The ASD team served as the program manager for all the UI IT projects which included the above projects, plus plain language, Splunk, Lexus Nexus, and civil rights compliance. Additionally, ASD staff coordinated with the UI Division to successfully implement new Federal UI Programs under the CARES Act and the American Rescue Act Programs including: Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC), Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), and Mixed Earners Unemployment Compensation (MEUC).

In 2021, the Google Cloud Platform (GCP) was introduced for the first time for DWD applications. ASD performed infrastructure design, setup, configurations, security provisioning, and performance tuning for the Google Cloud Platform. ASD staff also implemented Business Intelligence solutions throughout the department, working with the department's business partners to deploy numerous internal and public-facing dashboards, visualizations and laying the groundwork for the upcoming Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI).

Other ASD efforts in 2021 to enhance program effectiveness and integrity included:

- ◆ Improving the processes for paying for multi-functional devices and the error rate, by reducing the number of purchase orders from over 100 to one per division.
- ◆ Assisting on enhancements to the Worker's Compensation State Funds Tracking System (SFTS), which allowed more payments to be interfaced to the department's STAR system. These enhancements reduced manual entry, increased efficiencies, and reduced the error rate.
- ◆ Processing more than 10,000 outgoing United Parcel Service packages, over 4 million pieces of incoming mail, and over 6 million pieces of outgoing mail with a postage bill of \$2.2 million.
- ◆ Coordinating effectively with DWD's divisions, agency partners, and external vendors to deliver virtual services during the pandemic, including implementing necessary technologies for telecommunications and safeguards to ensure the continuity of service and secure remote access.
- ◆ Establishing approximately 1,200 Skype for Business telephony accounts.

## MISSION

Provide a seamless continuum of services accessed by employers and members of the workforce and their families with the following results:

- ▶ Employers have the talent they need
- ▶ Individuals and families achieve economic independence by accessing job search, training, and related services, making sound employment decisions, and maximizing their workforce potential

## Employment and Training

### OVERVIEW

DET oversees the majority of workforce services administered by DWD, including the state labor exchange system and Job Center of Wisconsin, analyzes and distributes labor market information, monitors migrant worker services, manages the Wisconsin Fast Forward grant program, and operates the state apprenticeship programs.

### DET SUCCESSFULLY PROVIDES SERVICES TO MEET CHANGING WORKFORCE NEEDS

In 2021, programs and services across DET continued to adapt their service delivery models to accommodate job seeker and employer needs.

The Bureau of Job Service continued to offer Re-employment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) sessions as tele-sessions, serving 9,916 individuals as of Oct. 31, 2021. Other one-on-one meetings with Job Service staff, including Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) appointments, were also offered via remote technology, accounting for an additional 4,096 meetings.

As of Oct. 31, 2021, Job Center of Wisconsin resource rooms have seen 19,277 visits since re-opening in spring 2021 – by appointment only in March and expanded to accept walk-ins starting in June.

The Migrant Seasonal Farmworker team collaborated with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to issue emergency orders in 2020 and again in 2021 to provide increased health and safety protocols for workers and outreach staff. The team also worked closely with local health officials and migrant labor advocates to connect migrant workers with vaccinations and worked to decrease vaccine hesitancy within the migrant community.

During the program year of July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I-B served 1,881 adults, 1,384 dislocated workers, and 1,384 youth. Due to the pandemic, DET effectively pivoted its monitoring for WIOA Title I to virtual.

From July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021, the Office of Veteran Employment Services (OVES) team effectively served 982 Veterans with individualized career services. In this timeframe, Local Veterans Employment Representatives also provided 4,427 employer services to 1,611 companies.

### DET SUPPORTS GOVERNOR EVERS' GROUNDBREAKING \$130 MILLION INVESTMENT IN WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

In 2021, Governor Evers announced an investment of \$130 million into solutions to address the state's workforce needs and support innovative pandemic recovery efforts. Funded through the American Rescue Plan Act, these funds supported the creation of three initiatives supported by DWD. First, the Worker Advancement



Initiative granted \$20 million to Wisconsin's workforce development boards to subsidize employment and skills training opportunities with local employers. These funds will serve unemployed, underemployed, part-time, and incumbent workers, and will target underrepresented populations.

Second, DWD collaborated with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to facilitate the \$100 million Workforce Innovation Grants with the goal of addressing critical local workforce issues. Lastly, the Governor's investment established the Worker Connection pilot program. This pilot facilitates connections across the workforce system and local communities to amplify, expand, and activate opportunities for person-centered services helping local economies flourish.

## **SUPPORT TO COMMUNITIES: FOSTERING OPIOID RECOVERY THROUGH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP GRANT**

From Jan. 1 – Oct. 31, 2021, 176 participants were served through the Support to Communities grant participating in a total of 847 services. The \$5 million grant provides training and career and supportive services to individuals impacted by the opioid crisis and offers training for individuals interested in pursuing careers in substance abuse recovery.

## **DET CONTINUES TO EXPAND CAREER READINESS AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES**

Throughout Wisconsin, in partnership with the Department of Corrections, DET supports 11 job labs within correctional institutions. Job Service and OVES staff travel to these correctional institutions up to two days per week to provide employment services.

In 2021, DET opened new job labs in eight correctional institutions including Robert E. Ellsworth Correctional Center, Chippewa Valley Correctional Treatment Center, Prairie du Chien Correctional Institution, New Lisbon Correctional Institution, Racine Youthful Offender Correctional Facility, Jackson Correctional Institution, Racine Correctional Institution, and Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution.

DWD also continues its partnership with DOC by offering opportunities for training and skill development in correctional institutions through service providers and the technical college system. DET made mobile training labs available at four correctional institutions in 2021.

**DWD and DOC partnership offers opportunities for training and skill development**

	<b>New Lisbon Correctional Institution</b>	<b>Taycheedah Correctional Institution</b>	<b>Jackson Correctional Institution</b>	<b>Racine Youthful Offender Correctional Facility</b>
<b>Instructional Partner</b>	Western Technical College System	Moraine Park Technical College	Western Technical College System	Gateway Technical College
<b>Certificate of Degree Earned</b>	Electro-Mechanical Service Certificate (12 credits)	Welding Certificate (10 credits)	CNC Operator & CNC Set Up Certificate (13 credits)	Mechatronics Technical Certificate (18 credits)
<b>Students: Training Completed</b>	10 (1/29/21 – 5/28/21)	5 (12/14/20-4/15/21)	12 (5/25/21-8/28/21)	9 (5/24/21-12/2/21)
<b>Students: Currently Enrolled</b>	11 (7/1/21-12/14/21)	8 (10/18/21-2/28/22)	11 (9/14/21-12/22/21)	12 (10/6/21-4/13/22)

## DWD AWARDED WORKFORCE EQUITY GRANTS

In SFY 2021, the IKEA US Community Foundation donated \$946,921 to DWD for a grant opportunity aimed at improving equity in southeastern Wisconsin's workforce. The donation was equivalent to the amount of Wisconsin unemployment insurance benefits paid to IKEA employees at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using these funds, DWD developed the Workforce Equity Grant program to provide skills training to underserved populations in southeast Wisconsin and to place trainees in an occupational training or work experience. In SFY2021, five grants were awarded to benefit 254 individuals. Employers were awarded funding to train workers in CNC, industrial maintenance, SOLIDWORKS CAD, childcare, and healthcare occupations.

## WISCONSIN FAST FORWARD PROGRAM INCREASES GRANT AWARDS

The Wisconsin Fast Forward program is an innovative talent development grant program driven by Wisconsin businesses to train and retain highly skilled workers. In 2021, the program issued 33 grants, totaling \$6.25 million. These awards represent new grantee commitments to benefit more than 1,754 individuals.

One program highlight includes the University of Wisconsin System internships grant. DWD awarded \$500,000 in 2021 to the University of Wisconsin System to promote and coordinate internships in high-demand fields. The initiative will source, prepare, and place 100 diverse student participants in paid internships with Milwaukee-area corporations in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years.

A total of \$1 million in Advanced Manufacturing Technical Education Equipment grants was also awarded through the Wisconsin Fast Forward program, with 33 Wisconsin school districts receiving grants in SFY 2021 to reimburse expenses for equipment, software, and consumables used in the advanced manufacturing workplace to train students in the operation of manufacturing equipment.

## VETS READY INITIATIVE



In 2021, DWD's Vets Ready Employer Initiative recognized nine Wisconsin employers for going above and beyond to support veterans and their families. In partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, Wisconsin Department of Disabled American Veterans, and the Veterans Chamber of Commerce, Governor Evers and DWD Secretary-designee Pechacek held events in Green Bay, Milwaukee, and Madison in November honoring this year's winners.

## DWD SUPPORTS WISCONSIN'S INTERNSHIP INITIATIVE

Due to pandemic-related restrictions, DWD staff activities shifted to focus on policy issues related to "returnships," innovative programming at UW-Milwaukee providing stipends to students to facilitate their participation in internships. DWD personnel maintained active participation in the Wisconsin Career Development Association, involved with national internship policy through affiliation with the UW Center for College-Workforce Transitions. Activities included:

- ◆ 38 outreach contacts to academic program chairs, deans, chancellors, and presidents;
- ◆ Use of WisConnect by 3,757 Wisconsin businesses;
- ◆ 11,554 Wisconsin-based internships posted on WisConnect; and
- ◆ 1,191 direct student contacts at job and internship fairs.

## YOUTH AND REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS CONTINUE TO GROW

The Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards continues to provide a successful and sustainable training model for employers to gain skilled talent and for individuals to find a career pathway into high-demand occupations with family supporting wages.

The Youth Apprenticeship Program continued to see steady enrollment with 5,417 students and 3,967 participating employers in the 2020-21 school year.

The Registered Apprenticeship program has also continued to grow throughout 2021.

	2020	2021 (As of 11/10/21)
Active Registered Apprentices	14,117	14,225
Apprenticeship Completions	1,475	1,577
New Apprentices	2,619	3,108
Active DOC Apprentices	40	38
Employers	2,801	2,847
Local Apprenticeship Committees	89	89
Active Certified Pre-Apprenticeship Programs	24	30

## MISSION

- ▶ To protect the rights of all people in Wisconsin under the civil rights and labor standards laws we administer,
- ▶ To achieve compliance through education, outreach, and enforcement by empowered and committed employees, and
- ▶ To perform our responsibilities with reasonableness, efficiency, and fairness.

## Equal Rights

### OVERVIEW

The Equal Rights Division (ERD) administers over 40 different laws, including laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations, and family and medical leave law. ERD also enforces laws pertaining to minimum wage, overtime pay, timely payment of wages, employment of minors, and business closings.

### ERD STRENGTHENS OUTREACH

In early 2021, ERD surveyed DWD job center customers to better understand what they knew (or didn't know) about ERD and its services. The survey found that nearly two-thirds of respondents were not aware of ERD services or how to contact the ERD for assistance. Of those who did know about ERD, over half had reached out to ERD for help in the past. From these results, it was apparent that ERD needed to build public awareness of the work it does. Thus, strengthening outreach was identified as a strategic priority.

#### *Collaboration with DWD Job Centers and Other Stakeholders*

Strengthening ERD outreach meant strengthening partnerships with job center staff who could help refer customers to ERD services. In July 2021, two Equal Rights Officers began working from the Menasha job center rather than ERD's administrative office to better understand how job centers engage with customers and identify opportunities to connect them to ERD services when appropriate. From this experience, ERD was able to develop a menu of ERD services with an easy-to-follow guide describing when such services might be appropriate. This menu was presented to job center leadership and front-line staff statewide to better equip them to refer clients to ERD when needed. The printable menu also allows clients to be given copies for personal use.

#### *Increasing Outreach and Diversifying Outreach Channels*

ERD also increased its outreach directly to consumers by developing new resources and processes to educate on worker rights and employer responsibilities. In 2021, ERD continued to create and publish 60-second videos on timely topics relevant to both workers and employers. By Q4 2021, these videos had been viewed over 3,200 times on YouTube, with additional videos published regularly. In April 2021, ERD began publishing an e-newsletter every two to three weeks called Know Your Rights. The newsletter delivers quick-hit information on worker rights straight to individuals' email boxes. Newsletter subscriptions steadily increased over the year, with a 17 percent increase by Q4 2021.



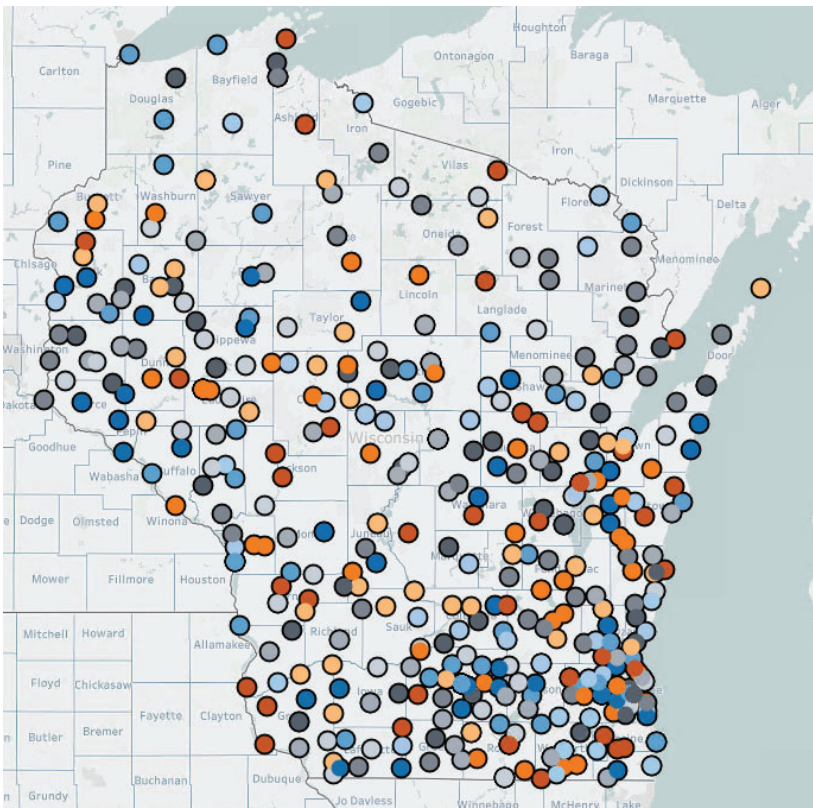
## IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE THROUGH DIGITAL ACCESS TO SERVICES

Strengthening outreach means more people are aware of ERD services, and this requires they be able to access those services when needed. To this end, ERD continued its work in 2021 to improve access to ERD resources, particularly virtual access.

In October 2020, ERD rolled out a new process for conducting hearings and mediations online using a video conferencing platform, and updated hearing processes, including those for organizing and sharing evidence. Instructional resources were developed to help parties navigate the new processes. By the end of Q1 2021, all ERD Administrative Law Judges were back to hearing cases at a pre-pandemic pace, and most parties participating in these online hearings reported having a full opportunity to present and defend their cases, with few technical glitches.

ERD has also developed methods for people to file complaints online. In April 2021, ERD rolled out online labor standards complaint forms, allowing individuals to complete and file complaints securely and directly from their personal devices. Adoption was quick, and by Q4 approximately three of every four labor standards complaints were filed online. In November 2021, ERD rolled out additional online forms for Fair Employment Act, Family and Medical Leave, and Fair Housing Act complaints. Additionally, ERD built the capability for parties to file supporting evidence in labor standards cases electronically. By eliminating the need to mail or ship these documents physically, ERD is removing obstacles for Wisconsinites to exercise their rights.

ERD has also made it easier for the public to access other services. Much of these efforts have involved updating or developing easier-to-navigate online resources. For instance, ERD now publishes an interactive map of child labor work permit offices that help individuals quickly find permit offices near them. This, together with other process improvements, has made it easier for minors to secure employment while still enforcing their legal protections. Additionally, updates to our call handling processes have reduced the number of calls going to voicemail, so customers in need of assistance can more quickly connect to a staff member.



### Work Permit Office Locations

ERD's online interactive map of child labor work permit offices that quickly identify the location of permit offices around Wisconsin.

## **MISSION**

To facilitate financial stability and a prosperous Wisconsin economy by delivering high quality, innovative, customer-driven unemployment services.

# **Unemployment Insurance**

## **OVERVIEW**

The UI program's primary roles are to provide:

- ♦ Temporary economic assistance to individuals who find themselves unemployed through no fault of their own and who are actively seeking work.
- ♦ Economic stability in the community during periods of economic downturn.

The UI program is financed by federal and state taxes paid by employers who are subject to the federal and state UI laws. Wisconsin was the first state to enact a UI law in 1932 to help stabilize the effects of the Great Depression.

## **UI OVERSEES THRIVING WORK-SHARE PROGRAM AMID HISTORIC DEMAND**

Throughout the pandemic, UI continued to successfully administer Work-Share, a program that allows participating employers to avoid layoffs during times of reduced business activity by offering employees unemployment benefits pro-rated to partial work reductions. Participation in the Work-Share program skyrocketed due to COVID-19 as employers began to consider alternatives to layoffs amid the crisis.

Participating in the Work-Share program benefits both employers and employees, allowing employers to retain their trained staff while employees maintain partial income and their full health benefits during times of reduced business activity. In the four years between 2016 and March 15, 2020, Wisconsin had only 20 total Work-Share plans involving 899 participants. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to present, DWD approved nearly 1,100 new Work-Share plans and almost 700 modifications to those plans covering more than 38,000 participants.

Although federal reimbursements for benefits paid through a Work-Share plan have ended, qualifying employers may still discover benefits to entering into a Work-Share plan agreement as an alternative to laying off staff. More information about the program can be found on the Work-Share website.

## **UI DIVISION ADAPTS TO CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Since March 15, 2020, Wisconsin has faced not only an historic public health crisis with the emergence of COVID-19, but a workforce and economic crisis as well. As of Nov. 6, 2021, the UI Division has paid out over \$7.1 billion to approximately 670,000 claimants since the start of the pandemic.

In 2021, UI processed half as many weekly claims compared to 2020. From a high of over 366,000 weekly claims in the first week of April 2020, weekly unemployment claims reached a low of 24,000 in the first week of November 2021.

At the beginning of the pandemic, while adjusting internal organizational plans to ensure staff safety through transitions to remote work or onsite social distancing arrangements, UI worked tirelessly to battle the avalanche of unemployment claims filed. In all of 2019, UI received 287,022 initial applications for unemployment benefits. When the pandemic hit, UI received roughly 240,000 initial applications within the two-week period from March 15 to March 31, 2020.

Through the first week of November, UI has received just under 5 million weekly claims in 2021. Between March 15, 2020, and Dec. 26, 2020, DWD had received more than 9 million weekly claims, compared to 7.2 million claims handled by the agency in the four-year period from 2016 to 2019. Though UI received more than four years of work in nine months, by Dec. 26, 2020, more than 96.89% of weekly claims filed were resolved.

## **UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ADVISORY COUNCIL COMPLETES WORK ON AGREED BILL**

The Unemployment Insurance Advisory Council (UIAC) advises DWD and the Legislature on policy matters concerning the development and administration of UI law. Labor and Management representatives work together to ensure stability in the UI system and collaborate on positive changes to enhance the program. The UIAC is recognized as essential and integral to the legislative process. As a result, controversial issues and the foremost policy concerns are addressed effectively. Council deliberations and negotiations resolve difficult issues while efficiently balancing the interests of employers and employees.

Every two years, the Council submits recommended changes to Wisconsin's UI law to the Wisconsin State Legislature as an "agreed bill" for the Legislature's consideration. In October 2021, the UIAC completed its agreed-bill process for the biennium.

In fall of 2022, a public hearing will be held to solicit comments on proposed changes to Wisconsin's UI laws. UIAC activities and related UI reports can be found on the Unemployment Insurance Advisory Council website.

## **UI MODERNIZATION EFFORT TAKES MAJOR STEP FORWARD WITH WISCONSIN IT PROVIDER**

DWD has mounted an unprecedented response to support those who lost jobs and income during the COVID-19 pandemic. The UI Division also has provided an unparalleled level of transparency in its efforts to overcome legacy unemployment insurance system challenges, implement innovative IT solutions, obtain federal funds to advance these efforts, and train and hire staff to compassionately assist customers experiencing challenges during these difficult times.

For the period of March 15, 2020, through the first week of November 2021, DWD has paid out more than \$7.1 billion in UI benefits to 670,000 claimants. In addition to providing relief to these individuals and their families, the funds have supported local businesses and communities, stabilizing the state's economy.

DWD has contracted with Madison-based Flexion to modernize the state's UI systems. Considering all elements of the system, including call center modernization, efforts to address support outside of business hours, IT infrastructure costs (cloud services, code repository, etc.), licensing to support the effort, change management needs, and other resources that may be needed to support the effort, anticipated costs are projected at up to \$80 million, to be paid for using federal funds.

To provide for the most rapid improvements in service to customers, the project will focus on the introduction of phased software solutions. The contract will involve integration of additional off-the-shelf software and cloud-based solutions along with significant custom software development, as determined through need.

## **UI UPDATES UNEMPLOYMENT APPLICATION AND COMMUNICATION**

### ***Application***

The UI Division reviewed and solicited public comment on the questions that claimants answer when they apply for UI benefits. UI then engaged the services of a vendor to analyze the claims questions and has since rewritten many application questions in plain language.

This work has resulted in significant process improvements for claimants filing for UI benefits. The effort was designed to make the application process more understandable to all individuals who may apply for UI benefits, regardless of their educational background or regional/cultural language differences.

This process has involved updating the language for both UI's initial and weekly claim applications. DWD released four updates in 2021 and plans a fifth release for production in early 2022.

### ***Claimant Portal Redesign***

UI created a new My UI Home page and redesigned the My UI Summary page on the Claimant Portal in March of 2021. The new look can be viewed on UI's New Portal Features website.

### ***Secure Messaging***

To enhance services and effectively communicate important information to UI customers, in March of 2021 UI implemented a secure messaging exchange between UI staff and claimants.

### ***Claimant Upload of documents capabilities***

In March 2021, UI introduced the ability to allow claimants to return select documents using an 'Upload Documents' option via the Claimant Portal Message Center.

## **NICE INCONTACT CALL CENTER SOFTWARE**

UI has moved its Call Center activities to a cloud-based software called Nice In-Contact. This new software allows flexibility in customer interactions and provides functionality in workforce management and quality control. This solution is both scalable and flexible to address the ever-changing needs of a government program.

The NICE CXone platform enhances the current DWD system with additional benefits:

- ◆ Modern web-based call delivery system that allows agents to work wherever they have an internet connection, providing greater flexibility for agents in taking and responding to calls.
- ◆ Scalability of solution in real time to address changing demands (both up and down).
- ◆ Ability to customize in-house call processing in real-time.
- ◆ Omnichannel approach that allows DWD to introduce other communication channels (e.g., chat, text messaging).
- ◆ Better ability to monitor interactions with customers.
- ◆ Enhanced real-time reporting, including number of unique callers.





Department of Workforce Development

## Vocational Rehabilitation

### OVERVIEW

DVR operations are located throughout Wisconsin, with many DVR offices co-located with Wisconsin Job Centers. DVR's central administrative office is in Madison.

DVR's primary services for job seekers with disabilities are:

- ▶ Career guidance and counseling;
- ▶ Disability and employment assessment;
- ▶ Job search and placement assistance;
- ▶ Information and referral services;
- ▶ Pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) for students ages 14 to 21; and
- ▶ Employment support services for individuals with significant disabilities.

All DVR services are developed in collaboration with the job seeker and written into an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). At any given time, roughly 13,000 individuals with disabilities are actively working toward an IPE goal with DVR.

DVR works with Wisconsin businesses, assisting them to effectively recruit, hire, and retain workers with disabilities.

- ▶ 11 DVR Business Services Consultants positioned across the state develop relationships with Wisconsin businesses to help support their hiring and recruitment efforts.

DVR's primary services for businesses are:

- ▶ Recruitment of pre-screened and qualified applicants;
- ▶ Retention strategies for employees with disabilities;
- ▶ Access to financial incentives for hiring qualified applicants with disabilities;
- ▶ Assistance to increase accessibility of business products and services for both employees and customers; and
- ▶ Education for managers and staff related to disability and employment.

### MISSION

The mission of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is to obtain, maintain, and improve employment for people with disabilities by working with consumers, employers, and other partners. DVR serves:

- ▶ Individuals with disabilities, assisting them to maximize their employment opportunities by helping them develop the skills that today's businesses are seeking in the workforce of the future; and,
- ▶ Wisconsin businesses, offering employers access to a pool of qualified job candidates with disabilities and disability-related information and resources to help them meet their workforce needs.

## DVR CONSUMERS SEE GAINS IN HOURS AND EARNINGS

Thousands of job seekers with disabilities in Wisconsin gained and maintained employment through DVR services as illustrated in the table below.

The global pandemic was a significant factor in the overall decreases in DVR's number of applicants and successful employment outcomes between SFY 2020 and 2021. Many current DVR consumers decided to temporarily suspend DVR services, and the number of new applications dropped during the year.

DVR Outcomes Data	SFY 2020	SFY 2021
Applicants for services	10,328	8,591
Successful employment outcomes	3,451	3,095
Eligibility determinations	10,116	7,547
Average hourly wage	\$14.20	\$14.84
Average hours worked per week	25	25.8

## DVR CONTINUES COLLABORATION WITH STATE AGENCIES

In 2018, Wisconsin Act 178 was enacted into law, requiring DWD, the Department of Health Services (DHS), and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to work together to increase the competitive integrated employment (CIE) for working age people with disabilities in Wisconsin who receive public services outside their home. Since then, DVR has partnered with both DHS and DPI to write two CIE biennial plans and produce three annual reports. Each CIE plan includes an executive summary, guiding CIE principles from each agency, and CIE targets for performance improvement. See the CIE Plan and Report website for more information.

## DVR SERVICES SUPPORT WORKFORCE PROGRAMMING IN WISCONSIN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

DVR and the DWD Division of Employment and Training partnered to deliver workforce services to individuals residing at nine correctional institutions. DVR most recently began offering services at Chippewa Valley Treatment Correctional Center and Prairie du Chien Correctional Institution.

## PROVIDING MORE SERVICES TO MORE PEOPLE

Beginning in December 2020, DVR began monthly activations of the Category 3 waitlist and has activated and served more than 130 Category 3 consumer cases since that time.

## CONTINUING TO SERVE WISCONSIN YOUTH

DVR has continued to increase its role in providing transition services to students aged 14 to 21 with disabilities. Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), 15 percent of federal Vocational Rehabilitation funding must be used for pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS). In Wisconsin, DVR is required to fund approximately \$9.75 million per year in Pre-ETS. In federal fiscal year 2021, DVR expended over \$10.38 million, averaging \$3,352 per consumer. This figure will grow further as invoices for services delivered in FFY21 continue to be paid.

## DESPITE PANDEMIC, PROJECT SEARCH CONTINUES TO FLOURISH

The number of sites participating in Wisconsin Project SEARCH grew from 27 during the 2019-20 school year to 30 in the 2020-21 school year. DVR successfully continued operations at 20 of its 30 sites and graduated 160 interns during the 2020-21 school year. The program is operating 25 locations for the 2021-22 school year.

## DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

In 2021, DVR issued a bid to engage the services of an outside organization for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion consulting services. These services include an assessment of the division's baseline for DEI and development of a plan for DVR to address and implement recommendations to improve agency DEI statewide.

## OUTREACH AND COLLABORATION WITH NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES

DVR has an assigned tribal liaison for each of Wisconsin's 11 federally recognized tribes. These liaisons provide scheduled hours on each tribal reservation to improve outreach and access to services for tribal members with disabilities. DVR developed and published a tribal liaison staff directory indicating the DVR staff person serving as liaison for each Wisconsin tribe. As of September 2021, 2% of current DVR consumers self-identify as Native American.

## STREAMLINING POLICIES TO BETTER SERVICE CONSUMERS

DVR updated the standard policy that DVR staff follow when working with people with disabilities who want to maintain self-employment through their existing business. Revisions to the policy expand criteria for determining whether a DVR eligible self-employed individual is eligible to receive services under the policy. Updates to the policy improve access to DVR services and assistive technologies for self-employed DVR consumers.

## DVR AWARDED \$14 MILLION CAREER PATHWAYS GRANT

DVR was awarded a five-year, \$14 million grant from the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration to assist people with disabilities in gaining new skills and industry-recognized credentials for high-growth occupations in health care, manufacturing, digital technology, and construction. The grant funding began Oct. 1, 2021 and ends Sept. 30, 2026. DVR anticipates enrolling up to 500 new, current, and past DVR consumers into the grant program. Using apprenticeships, career pathways, and other programs and services, the project aims to increase wages, hours worked, and job opportunities for people with disabilities to improve self-sufficiency and reduce reliance on public benefits.

### NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH (NDEAM)

In 2021, Governor Evers awarded 21 Wisconsin businesses with Exemplary Employer awards recognizing their efforts to foster a diverse and inclusive workforce by connecting talented individuals with disabilities to employment opportunities. DVR hosted 18 in-person events across the state honoring the award winning employers and their employees.



## **MISSION**

The mission of the Division of Worker's Compensation (WCD) is the promotion of healthy, safe work environments by maintaining a balanced system of services to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Wisconsin Worker's Compensation Act. The Division's work to ensure compliance with the Worker's Compensation Act includes, among other efforts, advancing worker protections and providing exceptional customer service – both of which are areas of focus in DWD's current long-term strategic planning efforts.

## **Worker's Compensation**

### **OVERVIEW**

WCD administers programs designed to advance worker protections by ensuring that injured workers receive prompt payment of required benefits from private insurance companies or self-insured employers. WCD also encourages rehabilitation and reemployment for injured workers and promotes the prevention and reduction of work-related injuries, illness, and deaths. The division also ensures compliance with provisions of the Wisconsin Worker's Compensation Act. Highlights of key functions include:

- ◆ Division staff manage the worker's compensation claims program, provide claimant assistance, set permanent disability ratings for claimants, and monitor accuracy and promptness of payments, health cost disputes, and return-to-work programs.
- ◆ Division attorneys resolve disputes related to health care service fees, necessity of treatment, and pharmacy fee schedules.
- ◆ WCD oversees the insurance functions of the worker's compensation program by managing the self-insurers program, the Uninsured Employers Fund, and the wrap-up insurance program.
- ◆ The division also serves as liaison with the Wisconsin Compensation Rating Bureau and the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance.

In fulfilling these responsibilities, WCD maintains a commitment to the delivery of exceptional customer service through streamlining services, empowering staff, and offering robust outreach and education.

### **WCD STRENGTHENS VIRTUAL EXTERNAL TRAINING WITH RECORD ATTENDANCE**

In April 2020, WCD transformed its training workshops for external stakeholders from in-person to all-virtual. Since that time, participation has steadily increased, from a few dozen attending in person to approximately 200 registrants from at least 18 states attending its November 2021 session. Almost all presenters were able to deliver information from remote locations, saving them and attendees travel costs, including flight and lodging costs for those attending from outside the state. Thanks to the virtual format, WCD is reaching more people than ever, further cementing the state's WC program as an innovator by leveraging 21st century technology.



## WCD IMPLEMENTS IT ENHANCEMENTS TO INCREASE TIMELINESS, IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE

The following IT system enhancements are reflective of WCD's ongoing commitment to the delivery of exceptional customer service by leveraging 21st century technology solutions to streamline and provide more timely and accurate services to all WCD stakeholders. WCD uses some 47 distinct applications for its functions and in 2021:

- ◆ Implemented barred claims in State Funds Tracking (SFT), resulting in 99% of Work Injury Supplemental Benefit Fund (WISBF) award payments being made through and tracked in SFT, reducing the number of direct invoices processed by staff and allowing for improved audit controls.
- ◆ Implemented reCaptcha on external-facing web applications to enhance security.
- ◆ Updated certified databases and forms necessary for the health care services reasonableness of fee dispute resolution process.
- ◆ Remediated all internal and external web applications to work with Microsoft Edge and Chrome, allowing WCD to eliminate Internet Explorer.
- ◆ Implemented Phase 2 of the Litigated Case Portal to include a security structure allowing firms to manage their user access, search their case documents processed by DWD, view a cumulative list of their uploaded files, and identify the type of document being uploaded through the portal.
- ◆ Completed minor enhancements to the Uninsured Employers Fund (UEF) system and Integrated Claims Management System (ICMS).
- ◆ Migrated WCD's six Oracle databases to version 18c running on Exadata.
- ◆ Migrated applications to Windows Server 2016.
- ◆ Began testing for the Kofax Total Agility (KTA) and Insight upgrade on all scan/validation processes and KTA workflows used in WCD.
- ◆ Continued working on the new Self-Insured Employers System (SIES). This system will be populated with data migrated from a legacy Access database. The new system will allow for tighter information security and will utilize Business Objects for reporting.

### NATIONAL SAFETY MONTH 2021: DWD TOUR HIGHLIGHTED SAFETY WITH REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP

On June 29, WCD Administrator Steve Peters and Safety & Risk Manager Dave Leix joined DWD Secretary-designee Pechacek for a tour to highlight DWD's Registered Apprenticeship program at the Boldt construction site at Ascendum in Madison. The tour was an opportunity to highlight Wisconsin's strong workplace safety culture, which is a win-win for companies like Boldt and for current and future workers like Registered Apprentices.

The Ascendum site tour featured a demonstration of safety techniques included in the Apprenticeship curriculum for students at Boldt construction sites and an overview of how to safely use tools and equipment on the worksite. Boldt is a leader in safety in the construction industry, earning nearly a dozen Corporate Safety Awards sponsored by DWD and the Wisconsin Safety Council over the past two decades.



*Pictured, from left to right: WC Division Safety & Risk Manager Dave Leix, (former) Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards Director Josh Johnson, WC Division Administrator Steve Peters, and Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek.*

## KEY METRICS

Selected Uninsured Employer Fund Metrics	2021 (January-October)
Uninsured Employer Fund (UEF) June 30 Balance (end of biennium)	\$33.5 million
Completed employer investigations by UEF Staff	21,689
Payments through UEF to on behalf of workers injured while working for illegally uninsured employers	\$1.6 million

Selected Claims Program Metrics	2021 (January-October)
Number of claims created for claim applications, third parties and hearing loss	1,330
Number of non-litigated claims scrutinized for accurate and timely payments	43,776
Number of verified/processed litigated and non-litigated claims for wage information	5,654

Selected Legal Services Metrics	2021 (January-October)
Number of processed and closed disputes involving reasonableness of fees, necessity of treatment and pharmacy fee schedule.	2,785
Number of processed hearing requests	2,767
Number of orders issued by DWD/WCD Administrative Law Judges	1,028

**STATE OF WISCONSIN**



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