



# Employment and Hispanic/Latinx Individuals with Disabilities: Barriers and Recommendations

## Introduction

People with disabilities are underrepresented in the workplace. In 2019, only 1 in 5 people with disabilities were employed.<sup>1</sup> According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, people living with a disability and mental health struggles can experience “double discrimination” that affects employment. “Double discrimination” includes stigma and misconceptions about both disability and mental health struggles.<sup>8</sup> Being part of multiple marginalized groups can lead to even more challenges. Hispanic/Latinx (H/L) people with disabilities have higher jobless rates than White people with disabilities, even when accounting for education levels.<sup>1, 2</sup> In addition to the workforce, H/L individuals are also underrepresented in vocational services.<sup>10</sup> This fact sheet offers information, recommendations, and resources to help individuals and providers begin to address this issue.

## Barriers

### *Misconceptions*

H/L individuals with disabilities are faced with misconceptions which can affect their employment opportunities. A misconception held by employers is that accommodations for employees with disabilities are overly expensive. However, most employers who have employees with disabilities reported little to no costs for accommodations. Accommodations often bring many direct and indirect benefits. These benefits include increasing productivity, reducing costs for training new employees, and improving interactions with co-workers and customers.<sup>7</sup> Another benefit is giving a public recognition supporting the people with disabilities community which can help fight stigma. A misconception that is specific to some H/L individuals with disabilities is that having an accent means an individual is less knowledgeable or qualified. Findings from a study showed that

applicants with a Mexican-Spanish accent were less likely to be promoted and rated more poorly than those with an American accent.<sup>6</sup> However, a person’s accent does not change the knowledge they have or their experience.

### *Expectations*

Low expectations from family, providers, and even from the individual themselves can affect employment outcomes. A person’s motivation to find a job and what jobs they will apply for are influenced by expectations. In many cultures, individuals, families, and communities may have low expectations for economic and community participation of people with disabilities. This can occur in both H/L and non-H/L cultures. Many H/L individuals with a disability may also have low expectations of themselves due to internalizing discrimination they have experienced or witnessed in society. According to a blind H/L individual, this affected her employment because it contributed to her not questioning her counselor’s job placement for her. She was placed to work in a factory with dangerous equipment while non-H/L individuals were placed in offices.<sup>10</sup> Individuals may begin to view themselves as less deserving of opportunities when this is the message they are being told by others.

### *Access and Use of Services*

The low rate of successful vocational outcomes of H/L with disabilities is believed to be related to low rates of participation in vocational rehabilitation programs.<sup>10</sup> Language and cultural differences are a few reasons why H/Ls with disabilities may not feel inclined to seek out or continue using these services. For example, some H/Ls have expressed how their culture views interdependence and independence differently than the majority culture in the United States. Some H/L families may have

hesitation and/or shame about using services and accepting help. Whereas family members helping each other is expected and is not seen as a lack of independence.<sup>9, 10</sup>

## Recommendations

Being open to and encouraging other perspectives on independent living and success can help improve participation of H/L individuals with disabilities in vocational services. However, many recommended practices have extending benefits that address multiple barriers. For example, being exposed to and increasing awareness of H/L role models with disabilities can help address misconceptions and low expectations. More recommended practices are providing information in Spanish, hiring bicultural and bilingual vocational staff, and providing training on cultural responsiveness.<sup>10</sup> Lastly, it is also recommended to improve accessibility for online job seeking and to use outreach efforts that encourage diverse applicants.

## Resources

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services are found in every state. VR helps individuals with disabilities to find and maintain employment. To be eligible, individuals must experience a significant difficulty with employment due to their disability and need VR services to reach their employment goals. Qualifying disabilities can include mental health concerns that affect employment too. Some examples of services are job coaching, employment placements, and vocational training. Some state VR services help pay for education and vocational training.<sup>5</sup> Also, it is important to know that schools are required to begin transition planning for students with disabilities at age 16. However, many states begin at age 14. Part of the transition planning is preparing students to receive VR services if they are eligible.<sup>4</sup> You can find your state's VR website and contact information by visiting the [Rehabilitation Services Administration's website](#).

Another helpful resource found throughout the United States is American Job Centers (AJC). AJCs offer free employment services for job seekers such as hiring events, career counseling, and provide information on unemployment insurance information and benefits. AJCs offer accessibility and

accommodations for people with disabilities.<sup>3</sup> To find an AJC in your area, you can visit the [Career One Stop website](#) which can be put into Spanish.

You can also visit the [Campaign for Disability Employment's Resources for Job Seekers & Employees webpage](#) for a plethora of recommended resources specifically for people with disabilities. This page also offers an option to be viewed in Spanish.

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