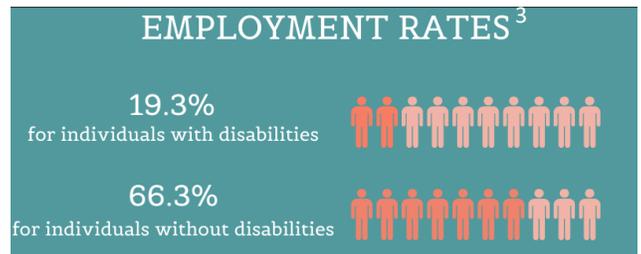


THE UNDERUTILIZED WORKFORCE

Individuals with disabilities are vastly underrepresented in the American workforce. For generations, they have been isolated not only in the workplace, but in society as a whole.¹ Current policies on both the federal and state levels are too weak and disparate to increase the likelihood of employment for individuals with disabilities. Increased employment of individuals with disabilities would have a multitude of societal benefits.



"Employment has been proven to improve the **physical, financial** and **mental** well-being of individuals with disabilities."²



THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT (2014)

Disability:

a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.¹

The newest federal policy to tackle this inequality, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, was passed in 2014 by the Obama Administration in hopes of improving the connections between individuals with disabilities and employers in order to increase employment rates among individuals with disabilities. The act also established “pre-employment transition services” for individuals with special needs through the American Job Center.⁴ However, the WIOA uses vague wording in “encouraging states” to align their job center services. Furthermore, the act provides no protection for wages and on average, workers

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

- 1 LOSS OF WELFARE**
Most disabled workers earn minimum wage for only 20 hours a week, thus reducing their qualification for welfare benefits even though they are still below the poverty line.⁵
- 2 LACK OF HEALTHCARE**
Only 24% of employed individuals with disabilities receive healthcare benefits.⁵
- 3 NO MINIMUM WAGE**
The WIOA provides no protection for wages and on average, disabled workers barely make minimum wage.⁵

with disabilities are paid \$7.82 an hour, barely above the minimum wage.⁵



SOLUTIONS

Integrated Employment

- Supported employment in which employees are integrated into the traditional work force is more expensive upfront, but over time the costs decrease dramatically, and eventually end up being half the cost of segregated employment. Segregated employment has been the historical choice for employers in order to keep disabled employees isolated.⁶

Performance Cue System

- Personal Digital Assistants, such as iPhones or tablets, prompt individuals with special needs when to do tasks and shows them how to do such tasks. They are more effective, less costly and less time consuming than typical behavioral training. PDAs also carry less stigma since most people carry a smartphone with them.⁷

Supported Employment

- State-funded supported employment consists of pairing special needs individuals with a job coach who trains them for a job and gradually wanes off support to foster independence. Studies have proven that supported employment not only costs less than segregated employment, but it also leads to more stable, long-term employment for individuals with disabilities.⁸

MYTH		FACT	
Hiring employees with disabilities is too costly because it requires accommodations.		58% of accommodations cost NOTHING and the remainder cost <\$500. ⁹	
Disabilities are only visible impairments.		The WIOA expanded the definition of "disability" to include learning disabilities, immune disorders and pregnancy-related disorders. ¹⁰	
Training individuals with special needs or disabilities is too time consuming.		Recent technology, such as digital assistants, has drastically sped up the training process. ⁷	

KEY TAKEAWAYS



- ☞ Individuals with disabilities are a highly underutilized workforce. There are many societal benefits to individuals with disabilities receiving more employment opportunities.
- ☞ Contrary to popular belief, accommodations for employees with disabilities are often times minimal and cost efficient.
- ☞ New technology allows for faster, cheaper and more effective training for individuals with disabilities, thus helping them to be capable of working in a variety of professions.

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