

**NEWS RELEASE** | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | October 7, 2019

## **Agency celebrates Disability Employment Awareness Month and reminds employers of an underused resource for meeting their workforce needs**

BISMARCK, N.D. – In North Dakota, there are an estimated 30,000 jobs available. Gov. Doug Burgum and the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Vocational Rehabilitation Division are joining federal and state partners in observing National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Together they are reminding employers that people with disabilities are an important resource for meeting their workforce needs. The division and its workforce partners can connect employers to qualified workers.

"North Dakota leads the nation in the employment rate of people with disabilities, and we can do even better. Our state still has significant unmet workforce needs, and we need to continue to break down stigma and barriers to employment to create more opportunities for all North Dakotans who want to work," Burgum said.

In North Dakota, the employment rate of working-age individuals with disabilities is 56.3 percent. Nationally, 35 percent of working-age people with disabilities are employed. \*

"National Disability Employment Awareness Month celebrates the contributions of workers with disabilities and educates about the value of an inclusive workforce. Many individuals with disabilities have marketable skills and abilities and the desire to work. We have the right talent, right now," said Vocational Rehabilitation Division Interim Director Robyn Throlson, who echoed this year's theme.

Vocational rehabilitation professionals help people with disabilities connect with training, education and jobs matching their interests and paying competitive wages. They also work with employers to fill job openings with qualified individuals and to help employees stay on the job or return to work after developing a new or worsening disabling condition.

To raise awareness, the agency is contacting television broadcasters across the state to ask their support for airing the "Working Works" public service announcement (PSA), which describes the contributions people with disabilities make at work, and the "Who I Am" PSA, which encourages employers to focus on abilities.

## Disability Employment Awareness Month – page 2

The division is sharing the PSAs with the approval of the federal Office of Disability Employment Policy in the Department of Labor and the Campaign on Employment of People with Disabilities. Both PSAs are also being uploaded to the department's YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/NDHumanServicesDept>.

The department and its VR division are committed to assisting individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment to achieve competitive integrated employment and increased independence.

"It's what people can do that matters," said Throlson. "Working is important to the quality of life of individuals and our communities."

The VR program, which is 79 percent federally-funded, helped 579 North Dakotans become employed last federal fiscal year. It also added value because for every \$1 spent on VR services, clients earn an average of \$8.25.

Vocational rehabilitation services include vocational counseling and guidance, job placement, assistive technology, vocational training, and pre-employment services for transition-age students with disabilities. VR business service specialists are available to meet with employers to share information about hiring individuals with disabilities and retaining employees. They also work to break down barriers and the stigma about hiring individuals with a disability.

For more information about vocational rehabilitation services contact 1 800-755-2745, 711 (TTY) or visit the website at [www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr).

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### \* Disability Employment Data Source:

Lauer, E.A. & Houtenville, A.J., 2019. Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: 2018. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, Institute on Disability and available online at [https://disabilitycompendium.org/sites/default/files/user-uploads/2018 Compendium Accessible AdobeReaderFriendly.pdf](https://disabilitycompendium.org/sites/default/files/user-uploads/2018%20Compendium%20Accessible%20AdobeReaderFriendly.pdf)

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