

**NEWS RELEASE** | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | October 11, 2021

## **Human Services reminds employers that people with disabilities are a valuable workforce resource**

*October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month*

BISMARCK, N.D. – With more than 17,000\* open and available online job openings in September 2021, the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is reminding employers that people with disabilities are a valuable workforce resource and that the division can help connect them with qualified applicants to meet their workforce needs or retain quality employees.

"North Dakota continues to lead the nation in the employment of people with disabilities," said division director Damian Schlinger. "It is important that business leaders with unmet workforce needs know that this potential talent pool can help them fill open positions while also providing meaningful employment that fosters independence and supports our state's economy."

A team of DVR counselors and business service specialists work directly with employers to share information about hiring people with disabilities and retaining employees. They also work to break down barriers and the stigma about hiring individuals with a disability and find solutions to other disability-related issues like making reasonable workplace accommodations.

Schlinger said workplace accommodations can help attract or retain qualified employees and oftentimes these accommodations cost very little and involve minor changes like flexible scheduling or work-related technologies.

Last year, DVR collaborated with statewide businesses to assist with recruitment and retention efforts and provided education on financial incentives, accommodations and disability awareness resulting in 525 people finding new careers.

Raquel Nachatilo, human resources director with the Missouri Valley Family YMCA in Bismarck said an inclusive workforce has had a positive impact on her organization.

"At the YMCA, we offer both wellness and employment opportunities for all. We believe in engaging people by welcoming, connecting, supporting and inviting them to be a part of our organization in a variety of ways," she said. "We visit with candidates to assess opportunities and resources that may be the right fit for them and for our organization."

The employment rate of working-age individuals with disabilities is 57.2% in North Dakota. Nationally, 38.8% of working-age people with disabilities are employed. \*\*

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The DVR can also help qualifying people with disabilities find employment, remain employed or advance their careers. Client-related services include assistance with resume writing, mock interviewing, training, education, assistive technology and other supports that can help them be successful at work.

To receive vocational rehabilitation services, people must have a disability that is an obstacle to employment, and they must want to work and be available to work. Many of the people the division serves have a physical or cognitive disability.

“Some people’s disabilities are lifelong and others are the result of a recent accident or injury,” Schlinger said. “There are many paths to employment. North Dakota’s strong economy gives our employment counselors a lot of opportunity to make impactful connections between employees and employers.”

North Dakota employers and people with disabilities can learn more about vocational rehabilitation services by contacting a regional office in their area. Contact information is available online at [www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr/about/regional-contact.html](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr/about/regional-contact.html). People can also contact DVR toll-free at 800-755-2745, 701-328-8950, 711 (TTY) or [dhsvr@nd.gov](mailto:dhsvr@nd.gov).

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation works in cooperation with Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation, the Centers for Independent Living in North Dakota, Job Service North Dakota, adult education, and other workforce development partner agencies to address workforce needs and to develop an inclusive, high-quality workforce in the state.

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### Sources

\* Job Service North Dakota. Labor Market Information Center. September 2021 Online Job Openings Report. <https://www.ndlmi.com>.

\*\* Paul, S., Rafal, M., & Houtenville, A. (2020). [Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: 2020](#) (Table 3.1). Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, Institute on Disability.

### MEDIA CONTACTS:

LuWanna Lawrence | 701-328-1892  
[lklawrence@nd.gov](mailto:lklawrence@nd.gov)

Heather Steffl | 701-328-4933  
[hsteffl@nd.gov](mailto:hsteffl@nd.gov)