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DISABILITY INCLUSION
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INNOVATION

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

CSAVR National News Brief

January 14, 2024

CSAVR *National News Brief* is a regular series covering legislative activity, media stories, research initiatives, webinars, reports, conferences, and national advocacy activities of interest to member state VR agencies.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: The CSAVR staff will be recognizing the Martin Luther King Federal Holiday on Monday, January 15, 2024. Staff will be back working normal business hours Tuesday, January 16, 2024.

HIGHLIGHTS:

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NATIONAL NEWS

Monday the CSAVR office will be closed in observance of Martin Luther King Day. This annual King Holiday Observance is a time that we celebrate, commemorate, and honor the life, legacy and impact of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Let us all take time to reflect on and celebrate the work of Dr. King.

[Benefits.gov \[click.icptrack.com\]](#) published an article, [Employment Resources for People with Disabilities \[click.icptrack.com\]](#), in the January issue of its Compass Newsletter. The article discussed employment benefits and resources for people with disabilities, their families, and employers. The article introduced readers to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) National Network, the two main programs from the US Social Security Administration, the Ticket to Work Program, and Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Finally, the article discussed disability-related tax credits from the Internal Revenue Service IRS.

Speaking of benefits, Social Security beneficiaries who rely on monthly checks from the SSA will get a [3.2% benefit increase \[cnbc.com\]](#) now that the calendar has turned to 2024. Those who receive Supplemental Security Income, or SSI, are [first in line \[ssa.gov\]](#) to receive those enhanced benefit checks. [About 7.5 million \[ssa.gov\]](#) SSI recipients started receiving their first checks for 2024 on Dec. 29, according to the Social Security Administration.

Also, the IRS has raised the ABLE account limit. With the new year, individuals with disabilities will be allowed to put aside more money in ABLE accounts. The IRS said that the federal gift tax exclusion increased to \$18,000 effective at the start of this month. The annual deposit limit for ABLE accounts is tied to that measure, so it will rise as well. The new limit is up from \$17,000 last year thanks to inflation and it reflects a change to the maximum allowable ABLE account contribution.

EXPEDITING ELIGIBILITY

On October 30, 2023, RSA published policy guidance titled, [Promoting Meaningful and Sustained Engagement of Individuals with Disabilities in the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program \[rsa.ed.gov\]](#) (RSA-TAC-24-01). Our thanks to RSA for this long-awaited guidance.

As previously shared, CSAVR's read of the TAC is that qualified VR counselors as defined per your state law and regulations constitute "qualified personnel," for purposes of the eligibility determinations. This we think is reinforced by 34 CFR 361.42 which states that only qualified counselors employed by the DSU can determine eligibility.

Per the TAC, for a VR counselor to be qualified, the State must have established personnel standards in its approved Unified or Combined State Plan that indicate its VR counselors have the competency and skill to make such determinations, which are comprehensive in nature. Such competency and skill are demonstrated in the State's standards. Thus, per RSA-TAC-24-02 *Requirements for WIOA State Plans for PYs 2024-27* it is important to ensure your CSPD portion reflects your state standards as to who is qualified to be a VR counselor. Note those plans are due 3/4/24 and again, you might want to review CSPD section of your plan.

CSAVR asked RSA to develop and sponsor a webinar to answer any questions concerning the TAC. RSA has declined that request. We appreciate those of you who have moved forward on this and hope those ranks will continue to grow.

CSAVR NEWS

CSAVR staff met with the Officers and Executive Committee (EC) this past week for the 2024 winter EC meeting. Agenda items included the Treasurer's Report, a CEO update, NCSAB report, discussion of the 2024 spring conference structure, progress on the strategic priorities, the final report from the TransCen /Mathematica funding study that CSAVR commissioned, new contract with the Harkin Institute, and a chat with new RSA Commissioner Allen, OSEP Director Williams and Deputy Commissioner Dobak.

Some highlights from the discussions are:

- There will not be a Day on the Hill at the spring conference and for those of you who wish to visit with members of your Congressional delegation, we at CSAVR are happy to assist you prepare for those visits.
- There will be the one-day Leadership Forum and Director Forum on the weekend immediately preceding the conference.

- We hope to again have multiple conference sessions and possibly a Call for Proposals.
- Among other tasks, The Harkin Institute for Public Policy and Citizen Engagement will be working with CSAVR to develop a series of issue briefs.
- The funding study final report has been received as well as slide deck of highlights and findings that will be available for your use in working with legislators and others to explain the challenges and needs for overcoming them.
- We identified gaps in work being done under the Strategic Priorities and steps to address them.

Stay tuned for more especially around the upcoming conference.

CSAVR YesLMS WEBINARS

Based on input from the field, CSAVR has partnered with YesLMS to offer a series of three free webinars. These webinars are recorded, will be captioned, and have ASL interpreters, and housed on the CSAVR YesLMS page for others to view and receive CRC credits. The last webinar in the series *Become an Adult Ally* is January 23rd. If you have not registered, there is still time:

RSA UPDATE

RSA Commissioner Dante Allen, OSEP Director Williams and RSA Deputy Commissioner Dobak virtually joined the EC meeting. Commissioner Allen was very engaged and expressed his desire to work with stakeholders such as CSAVR and “shining a light on best practices”. He noted that he was still forming his priorities and getting acclimated to the new job. By way of background, he shared the work he did in California to expand the ABLE program. He acknowledged the importance of building a partnership with CSAVR and others and expressed urgency in making progress.

Director Williams and the Commissioner expressed the need for State Special Education and State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Directors to further partner and collaborate to raise the bar for students with disabilities especially those who do not have parents who are not involved or able to be involved in assisting them on the path to employment and careers. They announced that Directors would be receiving the letter you got this past week citing ideas for further collaboration around development of state plans.

Deputy Commissioner Dobak announced that a symposium is being planned for February 25th on this topic of greater collaboration between SE and VR Directors. No details were forthcoming so stay tuned for more on this symposium.

The Notices of Final Waiver and Extension with Funding for the Rehabilitation Long-Term Training (84.129BHPQ) and Innovative Rehabilitation Training (84.263C) programs have published in the Federal Register. The notices authorize 51 projects under Assistance Listing Number (ALN) 84.129BHPQ and seven projects under ALN 84.263C to receive funding for an additional period, not to exceed September 30, 2025. Please refer to the [84.129BHPQ \[federalregister.gov\]](#) and [84.263C \[federalregister.gov\]](#) notices in the Federal Register for more information.

RSA announced a [pre-application webinar \[Inks.gd\]](#) to support the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Assistance Listing Number 84.250Q grant opportunity. [Watch the webinar \[Inks.gd\]](#) to learn more about this grant opportunity. The pre-application PowerPoint presentation is available on the NCRTM. Refer to the [Federal Register Notice Inviting Applications \[Inks.gd\]](#) and the [Application package \[Inks.gd\]](#) for more information about this.

RSA announced [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\) State Plan 2024 Resources Webcasts \[ion.workforcegps.org\]](#) that are now posted on Workforce GPS to provide States with information to consider while preparing and finalizing the WIOA State Plan for Program Years 2024-2027, due March 4, 2024. For additional information on the redesigned VR services portion of the State Plan, RSA developed the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\) Unified and Combined State Plan Training for Program Year \(PY\) 2024 \[youtu.be\]](#), released on September 25, 2024. To access the supporting PowerPoint presentation and transcript, visit the [National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials \(NCRTM\) Library \[ncrtm.ed.gov\]](#).

TAC PRODUCTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Please go to this link <https://cop.vrtac-qm.org/login/index.php> [\[cop.vrtac-qm.org\]](#) and sign up for the Fiscal Management Community of Practice. You will then be on our mailing list.

VRTAC-QM Manager Minute: How to Make VR Thrive! Building a Culture That

This is an unmonitored email account. Please direct any questions to: info@csavr.org

Withstands the Test of Time at Vermont General. Diane Dalmasse, Director of HireAbility Vermont, is in the studio today. Diane is the longest-serving director nationally in the VR program and has a lot to say about culture in the workplace and the changes Vermont made to retain and attract employees from across the nation. Learn about how hiring an organizational consultant back in the 90s continues to prove its worth today. [Listen Here \[managerminutevrtac-qw.libsyn.com\]](https://managerminutevrtac-qw.libsyn.com)

NENA NEWS

NENA has announced that its 2024 Annual National Training Conference will be held in Kansas City, MO on September 23-25, 2024.

REPORTS, TRAINING, NEWSLETTERS AND CONFERENCE OPPORTUNITIES

The [Rehabilitation Research and Training Center \(RRTC\) on Equity in Health and Function for Adults with Physical, Cognitive, Sensory, and Developmental Disabilities from Marginalized Communities \[click.icptrack.com\]](#) will host a webinar, [Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Disability Justice \[click.icptrack.com\]](#), January 18th, 2 - 3:30 pm ET. Presenters will share an introduction to the Disability Justice Framework and will explore the connection between the Disability Rights movement and the legacy of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Presenters will discuss what it means to work with and for individuals with disabilities and how their work aligns with disability justice and civil rights. Registration is free and required.

Michele McDonnall, PhD, principal investigator for the NIDILRR-funded [Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Employment of People Who are Blind or Have Low Vision \[click.icptrack.com\]](#), authored an article, [Tech hasn't removed all workplace roadblocks for those with low vision \[click.icptrack.com\]](#), in the Washington Post. The article explains how digital technology, including websites and software, can present barriers to employment for people with low vision and offers solutions for creating accessible digital environments for all employees and potential employees.

The [Northeast ADA Regional Center \[click.icptrack.com\]](https://click.icptrack.com) will host a webinar, [The Year 2023 in Review \[click.icptrack.com\]](https://click.icptrack.com), January 16th, 1 - 2 pm ET. Presenters will look back to notable developments related to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 2023. Presenters will share updates on ADA enforcement by different federal agencies, new technical assistance materials, and other federal efforts. Presenters will also discuss what's new at the Northeast ADA Regional Center and will look ahead to new resources in 2024. Registration is free and required.

The [National Center for Disability and Pregnancy Research \(NCDPR\) \[click.icptrack.com\]](https://click.icptrack.com) will host a webinar, [Pregnancy and Physical Disability: A Discussion for People with Physical Disabilities who are Pregnant or Thinking About Pregnancy \[click.icptrack.com\]](https://click.icptrack.com), January 18th, 12 - 1 pm ET. Presenters who are mothers with physical disabilities will discuss their pregnancies and births, including the positives and challenges, lessons learned, and unexpected aspects of their pregnancies. Discussion will be open to attendees with physical disabilities who are pregnant or thinking about pregnancy. Registration is free and required.

The [Southeast ADA Regional Center \[click.icptrack.com\]](https://click.icptrack.com) released the latest episode of ADA Live!, [Global Disability Rights and the International Day of Persons with Disabilities \[click.icptrack.com\]](https://click.icptrack.com). This episode featured the chair of the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, who discussed the work and mission of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Presenters discussed how the Convention is related to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), major accomplishments under the UNCRPD, and some of the important issues facing people with disabilities around the world.

The [North Texas Traumatic Brain Injury \(TBI\) Model System Center \[click.icptrack.com\]](https://click.icptrack.com) is recruiting individuals with TBI to participate in a telehealth-based healthy lifestyle intervention. Participants will complete 22 group-based telehealth sessions over the course of the 12-month intervention. Eligible participants must be between 18 and 80 years old, at least 6 months post-TBI, considered to be medically overweight, and be able to participate in physical activities. Participants will be compensated for completing four assessments during the study. For more information or to volunteer, contact Stephanie Calhoun at 214/228-5181 or Stephanie.Calhoun1@BSWHealth.org.

Social Security recently published a blog post titled "5 Things to Know When a Child with Disabilities Turns 18." To read the full blog post visit: <https://blog.ssa.gov/5-things-to-know-when-your-child-with-disabilities-turns-18/> [nenaticket.org]

COVID UPDATE

The project [Using the National Survey on Health and Disability Panel to Document the COVID-19 Pandemic Experiences of Working-Age Americans with Disabilities](#) [click.icptrack.com] is conducting the [2023 National Survey on Health and Disability \(NSHD\)](#) [click.icptrack.com]. The NSHD gives voice to the concerns of people with disabilities, and documents their experiences with a variety of issues, including access to health care, insurance coverage, housing, transportation, Long COVID, employment, and more. The survey is open to US adults 18 years or older, with any disability and any type of health care coverage, including no coverage. This is the fifth administration of the survey and previous respondents are encouraged to participate. For more information, call 855/556-6328 (Voice/TTY) or email healthsurvey@ku.edu. Participants may also complete the survey by phone. The survey closes January 31st.

RECENT ARTICLES

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Hickey, Emily J., Leann Smith DaWalt, Daniel Bolt, Jinkuk Hong, Jieun Song, Julie Lounds Taylor, and Marsha R. Mailick. "[Impact of the Great Recession on Adults with Autism and Their Mothers](#) [links.news.mathematica-mpr.com]." *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, vol. 129, no. 1, January 2024, pp. 26–40.

Kurtzberg, Terri R., and Mason Ameri. "[Beyond Compliance: A Randomized Trial of DEI Statements and Subsequent Signals for Job](#)

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Lu, Weili, Janice Oursler, Samantha J. Herrick, Ni Gao, John Beninato, Carolyn Bazan, Kendall Hill, et al. “**[Feasibility of Work-Related Interviewing and Conversational Skills Trainings for Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](https://links.news.mathematica-mpr.com)**.” *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, vol. 67, no. 2, January 2024, pp. 111–122.

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