



Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

CSAVR National News Brief

February 9, 2025

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

SPECIAL REQUEST: *As we approach the spring conference in Bethesda, I'm thrilled to relay that we have reached an agreement with the VR Workforce Studio podcast to lead our opening session. They will be featuring some amazing VR success stories, and they would also like to showcase and reference you during the session. If you have a great VR success story that can be showcased in a brief video, please contact Rick Sizemore at rick.sizemore@dars.virginia.gov for more information (this information is repeated in the conference discussion below).*

HIGHLIGHTS:

- [**NATIONAL NEWS**](#)
 - [**DC NEWS**](#)
 - [**DIRECTOR UPDATE**](#)
 - [**2025 CSAVR SPRING CONFERENCE**](#)
 - [**CSAVR NEW DIRECTOR TRAINING**](#)
 - [**TIP OF THE EDITION**](#)
 - [**NENA 2025 CONFERENCE**](#)
 - [**CANAR LEADERSHIP**](#)
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NATIONAL NEWS

February is Phone Free Month. Cutting back your phone use by just an hour a day can have significant health benefits, experts say. Emerging research shows that more screen time is associated with [higher rates \[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov\]](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/) of [obesity \[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov\]](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/), [sleep problems \[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov\]](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/) and [mental health issues \[link.springer.com\]](https://link.springer.com/). And psychologists are treating an increasing number of people who are addicted to their devices.

In January, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released its baseline for the budget and economic outlook. CBO projects that the national debt will exceed its record as a share of the economy in just four years – by Fiscal Year (FY) 2029 – before climbing to 118 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2035. Interest on the national debt will match its record as a share of the economy this year before rising to an unprecedented 4.1 percent of GDP by 2035.

Last year, the share of US workers with more than one job hit 5.3% of the workforce, the highest since 2019. In Wisconsin, North Dakota, and Hawaii, the percentage of workers with multiple jobs was roughly double the national average at about ten percent. *The Washington Post*

It is estimated that about 15,000 retail stores will close in 2025 which is about double last year's figure, the highest since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Some of the causes are online shopping, and high interest rates.

Other news stories of possible interest to you:

Diament, Michelle. "[IRS Raises ABLE Account Deposit Limit \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](https://links.news.mathematica-mpr.com)." Disability Scoop.

Diament, Michelle. "[Law Mandates National Disability Services Clearinghouse \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](https://links.news.mathematica-mpr.com)." Disability Scoop.

Heasley, Shaun. "[Social Security Taking Steps to Streamline SSI \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](https://links.news.mathematica-mpr.com)." Disability Scoop.

Weissner, Daniel. "[US Supreme Court Weighs Retirees' Ability to Sue for Disability Bias \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](https://links.news.mathematica-mpr.com)." Reuters.

DC NEWS

You probably know as much as we do about DC. Seems like it changes by the minute. CSAVR staff are doing all we can to look for opportunities to advance and protect the integrity of the program. We very much appreciate you sharing information that you get with us. Let me mention a couple of things.

CSAVR will be taking the lead on the protect COLA letter for FY26. Last year, we had over 30 organizations to sign-on and hope we will get the same organizations to do the same. CSAVR, APSE, & Ridge Policy Group will have some key Congressional meetings starting Monday.

On the recent Monthly Membership Call, Steve mentioned the issue of the imminent discussion of the President signing an Executive Order to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education. CSAVR does understand that there are States that may be in direct alignment with the Presidents' goals with the dismantling of Department of Ed, and CSAVR does not want to put you in a position to be asked to go against that alignment knowing you may have to answer to your Governor's office.

Many of our National Disability Partners and the community are advocating against the dismantling of the U.S. Department of Education, and VR not leaving the Department of Education to go to Department of Labor. CSAVR understands our you may need a balanced approach and may have a different opinion, and we have shared a few talking

points to help with the pros and cons that may be helpful to you in terms of this conversation.

DIRECTOR UPDATE

Congratulations and welcome to Kim Rutledge who has been named as the new Director of CA-C. She was formerly the Deputy Director of Legislation and Communications at the Department.

2025 CSAVR SPRING CONFERENCE

We are getting excited about the upcoming Spring Conference April 4 to 9 and hope you are too. It will be our last time at the Bethesda Hyatt (sure will miss those escalators). Given the achievements of the program due to your work last FFY, we want to build off that success and the conference theme is ***Building on our Success: Beyond the Buzz***

If you have not been to the [Events \[csavr.org\]](https://csavr.org) page of the CSAVR website, please do so because there is a lot of information posted. Registration is open and closes April 1, 2025. Building on the theme above the conference is being built around three tracks:

- *Track #1* – Building on our Successes: Policy and process streamlining
- *Track #2* – Building on Our Successes: Fiscal controls and management
- *Track #3* – Building on Our Successes: Personnel development, recruiting and retention

For the conference we are seeking innovative, high-quality proposals for nine (9) concurrent sessions addressing the tracks noted above. Proposals are due by midnight EST on Friday, February 28, 2025. Proposals must be submitted by the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (SVRA) as partners are welcomed and encouraged as collaborators on proposals, but the lead must be a SVRA.

We look forward to seeing you in Bethesda!

CSAVR NEW DIRECTOR TRAINING

If you were appointed as a Director since April 1, 2024, or are serving in acting capacity since then you should have received information this past week from John regarding this training. If we missed anybody, please accept our apologies and let John know. Thank you.

TIP OF THE EDITION

We experienced a brief scare a week ago when OMB issued notice M-25-13, temporarily halting federal grant and other funding. Fortunately, this was quickly reversed with the release of IMB M-25-14. The rush among agencies to draw funds before the anticipated freeze took effect serves as a reminder that states/SVRAs must stay proactive in managing their cash draws through the Department of Education's grant management system.

We recognize that some SVRAs only draw funds once a year, but this situation underscores the importance of maintaining regular and timely drawdowns. Additionally, agencies that withdrew large sums without an immediate need should be mindful of federal interest requirements, as holding excess cash for extended periods may result in compliance issues.

NENA 2025 CONFERENCE

NENA has announced that it will hold its 2025 conference on September 16-18, 2025, at the Flamingo Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, NV. They will soon be issuing the RFP for breakout session submissions.

CANAR LEADERSHIP

Congratulations to Emma DeLaCruz who was elected President of CANAR, (Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation, Inc.) as of December 2024. I know many of you work with CANAR and some have attended their conferences with their 2025 Mid-year Conference coming up June 3-5, 2025 in Spokane, WA. We at CSAVR look forward to continuing to work with CANAR and President DeLaCruz.

TAC HAPPENINGS

VRTAC QE has announced their February webinar on 2/20/25. Title: *Using Emerging Technologies to Improve Supported Employment Service Delivery to Rural Youth and Adults with IDD*. This webinar explores the challenges of delivering supported and customized employment services in rural areas for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Participants will discover how emerging technologies like generative AI, virtual job coaching, and robotics can enhance service delivery and skill-building. Here is the [REGISTRATION LINK \[tacqe.com\]](https://tacqe.com).

VRTAC-QM Manager Minute: AI-Powered Solutions: Streamlining Services with MassAbility and Massachusetts Commission for the Blind

This *Manager Minute* episode spotlights how the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind and MassAbility are leveraging AI to improve service delivery. Host Carol Pankow discusses innovative AI applications with guests Lola Akinlapa, Nathan Skrocki, and John Oliveira. They explore an AI-assisted intake platform designed to streamline processes, enhance multilingual support, and enable faster access to services. The conversation also highlights AI-powered tools like policy lookup systems and data visualization platforms like Tableau. Emphasizing accessibility and transparency, the episode showcases AI's potential to alleviate administrative bottlenecks, support staff, and empower consumers while preserving the human touch in service delivery.

[Listen Here \[managerminutevrtac-qw.libsyn.com\]](https://managerminutevrtac-qw.libsyn.com)

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DOE APPOINTMENTS

Since the last News Brief the following DOE appointments have been announced:

- James Bergeron – Deputy Under Secretary, who recently served as President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Council of Higher.
- Julie Hartman – Senior Advisor, Office of Communications and Outreach, who is a broadcast host and writer.
- Amber Mariano Davis – Policy Advisor, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, who most recently served as Director of State Government Affairs at Code.org.
- Savannah Newhouse – Special Assistant, Office of Communications and Outreach, who most recently served as Communications Director for Senator Marsha Blackburn's (R-Tenn.) successful re-election campaign in Tennessee.
- Isaac Hampton – Special Assistant on Higher Education, Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs, who most recently served as the Regional Election Integrity Director for the Montana GOP during the 2024 election.

- Nicholas Stone – Special Assistant on K-12, Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs, who most recently serving on the Trump-Vance 60th Presidential Inaugural Committee.

NVRTAC NOTICE

On January 17, 2025, ED published a notice calling for comments on the proposed creation of a national VR TAC which would combine the current VRTAC QE and QM functions into one center. Comments are due on or before February 18, 2025. [See the Notice here \[federalregister.gov\]](#).

CSAVR is working on preparing comments to submit. We would like to hear from you concerning this proposed NVRTAC. What will be most important is for ED to hear directly from you and your partners and customers. CSAVR for lack of a better term is the hired gun thus your direct input carries more weight so dig into this Notice with your staff, partners, and customers and prepare comments to submit on or before February 18th.

NCSRC 2025 SPRING CONFERENCE

The National Coalition for State Rehabilitation Councils, (NCSRC), is preparing for their Spring Conference being held this year on April 5th and 6th, 2025 at the Hyatt Regency Bethesda Hotel. The NCSRC provides training, best practices, and networking for State Rehabilitation Councils, (SRC). The NCSRC is requesting presenters and proposals for their conference.

If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity including submitting a proposal, please contact Pat Tomlinson at mandalay@comcast.net. Proposals must be submitted by February 21, 2025.

REPORTS, TRAINING, NEWSLETTERS AND CONFERENCE OPPORTUNITIES

The [Rehabilitation Research and Training Center \(RRTC\) on Employment for People Who are Blind or Have Low Vision \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#) published [resources for Spanish speakers who are blind or have low vision \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#). The resources include guides, factsheets, resource lists, and more, and provide critical information about employment and transportation.

Research from the NIDILRR-funded project [Technologies to Support Aging Among People with Long-Term Disabilities \(TechSAge\) \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#) is featured in an article, [Using technology to support the everyday activities of people aging with long-term disabilities \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#) (PDF), in Certified Senior Advisor Journal. The article spotlights three TechSAge projects that use commercially

available products to demonstrate the potential of technology to enhance social connection, wellness, safety, and activity performance among people aging with disability. The article is available free in full text

The [Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center \(MSKTC\) \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#) published a new infographic, [How to Age Successfully with Spinal Cord Injury \(SCI\) \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#). The infographic shares information on what to expect as a person ages with SCI. The factsheet provides strategies on how to age successfully with SCI and tips on creating social networks for healthy aging. The factsheet is available in English and Spanish.

Research from the NIDILRR-funded project [BeHEALTHY: Chronic Disease Management for Traumatic Brain Injury \(TBI\) \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#) is highlighted in a special communication, [Model of Care for Chronic Brain Injury \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#), in Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. The article describes the development, structural features, and core components of the BeHEALTHY model, a person-centered approach to long-term support of persons with chronic TBI that recognizes the individual, along with their social support system, as the primary source of goals in care planning.

The NIDILRR-funded [Temple University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Community Living and Participation of Individuals with Serious Mental Illnesses \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#) seeks participants for a trial of an online peer facilitated process that supports individuals in creating a personalized system for recovering, sustaining, and/or improving their whole health and enhancing their lifestyle. Participants must be 18 or older, experience significant mental health challenges, and be currently enrolled in college in the US with at least two semesters left. To volunteer, [complete the screening questionnaire \[click-654309.icptrack.com\]](#). For additional information, contact takingaction@temple.edu.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Ahonle, Zaccheus J., Tianlan Wei, Phillip D. Rumrill, Jr., and Christina Dillahunt-Aspillaga. "[Comparing Competitive Integrated Employment Outcomes in the State-Federal Vocational Rehabilitation Program Among Individuals with Cognitive, Physical, and Sensory Functional Impairments \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#)." *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 2025.

Bölte, Sven, Joseph Alexander Carpini, Melissa H. Black, Allan Toomingas, Frida Jansson, Peter B. Marschik, Sonya Girdler, et al. "[Career Guidance and Employment Issues for Neurodivergent Individuals: A Scoping Review and Stakeholder Consultation \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](#)." *Human Resource Management*, vol. 64, no. 1, 2025, pp. 201–227.

Gross, Max, Betsy Keating, Josh Colten, Rachel Miler, Laura Radel, and Marissa Abbott. "[Prevalence and Characteristics of Children Entering Foster Care to Receive Behavioral Health or Disability Services \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](https://links.news.mathematica-mpr.com)." Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2025.

Krause, James S., Clara E. Dismuke-Greer, and Karla Reed. "[Expectation of Engagement in Employment in 5 Years: Findings Among Participants with Spinal Cord Injury \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](https://links.news.mathematica-mpr.com)." *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2025, pp. 102–109.

Schwartzman, Benjamin C., Emily R. Lanchak, Erik W. Carter, Laura E. Guest, Elise D. McMillan, and Julie L. Taylor. "[Family Perspectives on Promoting Paid Employment for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](https://links.news.mathematica-mpr.com)." *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2025, pp. 79–91.

Tremblay, Stephanie M., Shalini Lal, Mark A. Ferro, and Dana R. Anaby. "[Mental Health Practices in Rehabilitation for Youth with Physical Disabilities: A Chart Review Study. \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](https://links.news.mathematica-mpr.com)" *Disability and Rehabilitation*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2025, pp. 340–346.