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# Annual Report

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FY25

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Agency Impact

**MassAbility**

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A background image of a sunset over the ocean. The sun is a bright white circle on the horizon, casting a golden glow across the sky and reflecting on the water. The sky transitions from a deep orange near the horizon to a pale blue at the top. The water is dark with shimmering reflections of the sun.

**MassAbility**

# From the Commissioner

Dear Friends and Partners,

As I reflect on this past year, I am filled with pride for what we accomplished together at MassAbility. Despite significant challenges, our agency served over 75,000 Massachusetts residents with disabilities within our Disability Determination Division, 23,000 in our Career Services Division and over 10,000 in our Home and Community Life Division—a testament to the dedication and resilience of our entire team.

Our Disability Determination Services (DDS) division faced unprecedented staffing vacancies, including critical shortages of examiners and psychological consultants. To address case processing delays caused by doctor shortages, the Social Security Administration made physicians from other states available to support our work. Processing this enormous volume of cases required every department working together with singular focus and collaboration.

Within our Career Services Division, we achieved far more than the numbers reflected in this report. This year, we conducted a comprehensive review of Career Services best practices and designed an ambitious roadmap for 2026 to advance employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. We proposed significant internal service delivery improvements, including innovative approaches within Business Relations and Self-Employment services. Most notably, we redesigned a provider service model through our Comprehensive Integrated Employment Services (CIES) and Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Request for Response, scheduled for release in 2026.

As our five-year RSA-funded grant approaches its conclusion in June 2026, we established a NextGen Integration Workgroup this year. This team identified four critical practice principles and developed an action plan to integrate these practices into four Area Offices, creating a guide for expansion across all Career Services Area offices in the future.

Our Home and Community Life Division achieved a milestone by transitioning over 150 individuals from nursing homes into community settings, where people with disabilities can truly live life on their own terms. Despite funding and staffing reductions, our Homecare, Supported Living, and Statewide Head Injury Services teams found creative solutions to maintain quality service delivery.



We remain eager to use technology to advance our work; Our newest division, the Department of Excellence and Innovation, continued to leverage technology to advance our mission. One such advancement is the use of AI-enhanced tools to streamline eligibility determination for participants, including the release of MassAbility Connect and its single application for multiple programs.

Real-time data validation, automated eligibility checks, and smart pre-fill features help to minimize errors and save time in the application process. Staff and participants have been able to adopt these tools with ease thanks to the user-friendly design, freeing up significant roadblocks. Our Assisted Intake software also saw improvements in our case management system, and for the first time, our analytics team can now review data and identify service trends across the agency.

Additionally, with the establishment of the agency's first Clinical Director, we can now provide clinical consultation and emergency support for staff and participants within our Career Services and Home and Community Life Divisions. This will allow those we serve living with complex needs to receive more comprehensive, coordinated care and support. This commitment extended to our Learning and Community Engagement department where the team's adaptability shined, resulting in robust training and consultation offerings for all staff across our divisions. And let us not forget, MassAbility's Connect Team received the Manuel Carballo Governor's Award for Excellence in Public Services!

Our ability to provide services is, in part, thanks the robust infrastructure we have built to support both staff and participants. This year, we addressed operational pain points and design interventions that modernize and standardize our procurement, contracting, and billing processes. This work is critical to strengthening our operations for years to come.

Finally, we cannot review this year without reflecting on the political and economic challenges we faced, like state hiring pauses and the longest federal shutdown in our nation's history. Thanks to the strong fiscal infrastructure we have built over the years, we were positioned to support the 73% of our staff who are state employees funded by federal dollars. Despite federal inefficiencies and uncertainties, MassAbility remained steadfast and supported our providers and our participants without missing a beat.

As we look toward 2026, we draw strength from the resilience of the people we serve and remain steadfast in our determination to support their hopes and dreams for a better life in the Commonwealth. It is an honor to work alongside our staff, provider partners, employers, and our Statewide Rehabilitation Council—and to have the continued support of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and the Administration. Together, we remain committed to our core values: everyone matters and deserves to live their best life.

With gratitude and determination,

Toni Wolf  
Commissioner of MassAbility



# A Year in Review

Our first full year as “MassAbility” featured milestone achievements of major initiatives like NextGen Careers and a year full of incredible outreach through collaborations in our communities.

Throughout 2025, our outreach and engagement efforts were rooted in a single guiding principle: access is essential.

Across Massachusetts, we showed up in community spaces, classrooms, conference halls, and celebratory marches, working alongside partners and connects to advance inclusion, visibility, and opportunity for people with disabilities.

We spent the year uplifting accessible arts, culture, and recreation, highlighting what is possible when inclusion is built into design from the start. From attending an inclusive dance performance by Abilities Dance Boston, to

interviewing the owner of Boda Borg Boston about intentionally designing accessible mystery challenge rooms, to a fully accessible Shakespeare play by Commonwealth Shakespeare Company, we helped spotlight models of entertainment that welcome everyone.

We also supported adaptive recreation programs hosted by the Department of Conservation and Recreation and learned about assistive technology advancements at the Museum of Science. We stood with advocates at the State House in support of the first-ever state recognized CVI Awareness Day with Perkins School for the Blind and CVINow. Each of these moments reinforced the idea that access fuels creativity, innovation, and belonging.

Visibility and pride were also central themes in 2025. Despite the rain, our team proudly marched in Boston Pride, surrounded by rainbows, resilience, and community spirit. We also commemorated

the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, marching together through the streets of Boston to honor decades of progress while reaffirming our commitment to the work still ahead.

Investing in the next generation of leaders and creators remained a priority. We spoke directly with youth and artists with disabilities at events such as the Youth Leadership Forum and the MassCreative’s Disabled Artists Panel. There we shared resources, listened to lived experiences, and amplified voices and experts that are often left out of traditional spaces. We also attended disability expos and community events across the state, meeting people and stakeholders where they are and connecting people to services.

A significant portion of our outreach work in 2025 focused on statewide brain injury outreach, education, and training. We traveled across Massachusetts to deliver

presentations, share resources, and build awareness in partnership with the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts (BIA-MA). Through grant-funded outreach, our team at the Statewide Head Injury Program and BIA-MA conducted extensive community engagement through conferences, trainings, and presentations. Every session included a dedicated resources section, ensuring attendees knew how to connect with our programs and supports. Together, our total community reach exceeded 12,000 individuals! Notably, this year also marks the completion of the NextGen Careers Program, a short-term initiative focused on providing

specialized careers services for individuals with disabilities aged 18-30 years old interested in careers in STEM. Thanks to a grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), we were able to create new service models and improve the impact of career services for participants and identify key strategies to implement across departments.

To support this, NextGen partnered with UMass to research and study the impact on participants with the goal of using that data to inform the development of future Career Services programs and understand the significance of specialized career support.



Out of 862 participants engaged in NextGen program, 81 have achieved successful employment outcomes related to their career goals, and 168 participants are actively employed. Many of these individuals will continue with MassAbility's Career Services unit as NextGen ends to provide continued support and success returning to work.

2025 was a year defined by presence, partnership, and purpose. Each event, conversation, and collaboration with local businesses, service providers, and employer partners strengthened our collective momentum toward a more accessible and inclusive Massachusetts.





## Championing Inclusive Hiring at Partners in Possibility



MassAbility hosted its first-ever “Partners in Possibility” employer-focused event on September 24th at the Royal Plaza Trade Center and Hotel in Marlborough.

By bringing together employer partners and MassAbility staff, folks explored inclusive hiring practices and championed the employment of qualified individuals with disabilities.

The morning kicked off with keynote speaker Becky Curran, who spoke on her experiences as a professional with a disability and her career journey, drawing upon stories from times when opportunities opened up to her and allowed her to break into the film and tv industry.

Becky, alongside a panelist of employer partners, highlighted that the true barrier to employment is not disability, but inaction. The employment gap persists not because of a lack of talent or drive, but because opportunity hasn’t always met ability.



Attendees enjoyed an engaging panel discussion with our panel of Employer Partners: Michael Tamasi of Accuro, Colleen Moran of UMass Memorial, Courtney Reggiani of Mass General Brigham, and Rick Laferriere from CVS. Each spoke to the support from MassAbility and provided personal anecdotes that underscored the value of hiring disabled talent. Assistant Commissioner Joan Phillips noted that these leaders didn’t ask “Can we do this?” but instead asked, “How can we do this better?”

Employees hired through MassAbility received the training and support needed to succeed upon placement. The result? Stronger, more committed teams and workplaces that reflect the full potential of our communities.

Following the thought-provoking conversation, employers were able to ask questions and gain advice and insight from our panelists before splitting into breakout sessions led by MassAbility Career and Business Supervisors Stephanie Dort, Hrothgar Lane, and Drew Ritter.

In one session, thanks to Stephanie, employers gained a full understanding of the services that MassAbility provides to hiring teams, managers, and employees that we support, like On the Job Training,



and how to access different tax incentives and reimbursements for pre-hire training periods and internships.

“I’m just not sure how to interact with an employee with a disability, what if I say something wrong?” is a common sentiment shared by people who are not familiar with disabilities. According to the National Labor Force, people with disabilities are employed at a rate of 24.7 compared to non-disabled individuals at 68.4%.

Misconceptions about disabilities can lead employers to feel unsure how to interact with employees with a disability. By understanding the different experiences and possibilities of workers with disabilities, employers can feel confident hiring qualified talent for their company and help to close that employment gap.

Hrothgar and Drew lead employers in breakout group exercises to talk about these misconceptions, perceived limitations, and assumptions about different disabilities.



Employers were able to share their misconceptions and asked questions in a space to learn without judgement, which empowered them to engage and learn about the varied experiences of people working and living with disabilities. Employers realized their own assumptions about an employee with a disability do not reflect on the capability of an individual and ultimately create a roadblock in employment.

In one example, an employee with hearing loss wasn't invited to in-person team meetings because of an assumption that they wouldn't be able to hear the conversations. But this employee needed context from the meetings that was often lost in follow-up emails. The solution was simple: in team meetings, people would take turns talking, not talk over one another, and face the group while speaking.

As Hrothgar pointed out, most accommodations requested by employees with a disability are not costly. Drew ended the presentation with the sentiment that it's not the disability that presents a barrier, but rather the assumptions others can have. It is important to work on addressing our own assumptions about disability to ensure a smooth-working environment for all employees.

When Becky shared stories from her life, she shared that her journey was possible because of her willingness to succeed and the others around her who helped to enable that success. She had advice for the employers in attendance, highlighting the positive impact of creating



opportunities for disabled employees to rise into responsibility.

When you compare the National Unemployment Rate for individuals with disabilities to non-disabled individuals, the difference is more than doubled; a staggering 10% versus 4.3%. These statistics underscore the importance of creating equitable employment opportunities and the role employer partnerships play in closing these gaps.

The Partners in Possibility event was a powerful reminder of the impact we can make when we collaborate across sectors. By working together, we can break down barriers and unlock the potential in every individual. Assistant Commissioner Joan Phillips delivered closing remarks and ended with a call to action: "Let's not just imagine what's possible—let's build it. Together, we can create a Commonwealth where everyone has a chance to thrive."

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**"It reinforced my belief that building workplaces where everyone can thrive isn't just the right thing to do. It's a strategic imperative for innovation. and growth."**

Ivy Mah, Tecomet INC

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## **Burns Fortes Consulting (BFC) & MassAbility: A Transformative Partnership**

"BFC's collaboration with MassAbility has been a cornerstone of our efforts to support individuals on their recovery and educational journeys.

This partnership has brought measurable impact, particularly through the Recovery Coach Academy, where MassAbility's commitment to support, peer-led engagement has empowered our clients and strengthened our services.

One notable success story involves a client referred by MassAbility to BFC to attend our Recovery Coach Academy. After completing the 3-week training, they returned as an Intern and are now on a path to employment with our organization, this individual was able to bring in with them both lived experience and professional training to inspire others.

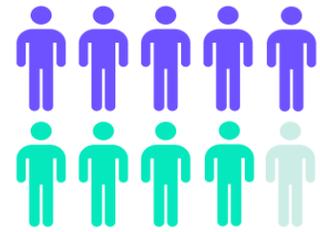
This full-circle moment exemplifies the power of MassAbility's approach and the real-world outcomes it fosters. Working with the MassAbility team has felt like an extension of our own values. Their responsiveness, deep expertise, and genuine investment in client success have made them an invaluable partner.

What sets MassAbility apart is their unique ability to blend professional development with peer empowerment, something we haven't found anywhere else.

To other organizations considering a partnership, BFC would say this: MassAbility brings both heart and results. Their work aligns seamlessly with our mission to foster resilience, dignity, and community healing, and we are proud to stand alongside them in this shared vision."

# Fiscal Year at a Glance

## Career Services



**23,321** participants receiving career services

**16,477** participants enrolled in training/education

**10,396** new individuals determined eligible for services



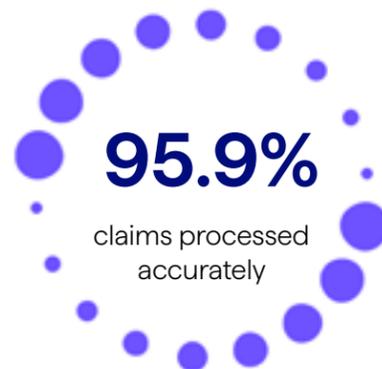
**36.8 years old**

average age at application

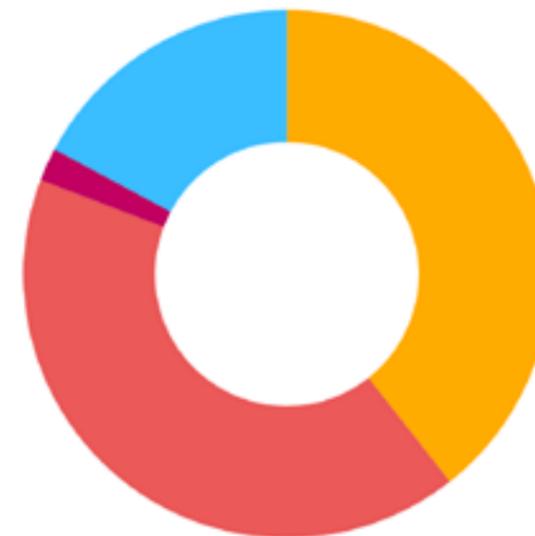
## Home & Community Life



## Disability Determination Services



FY25 Funding FUNDING AREA	Funding Source				
	STATE	FEDERAL	TRUST	CAPITAL	TOTAL
Career Services	\$40,020,452	\$50,288,482	\$4,805,429	n/a	\$95,114,363
Home & Community Life	\$87,613,040	\$3,239,350	\$6,597,817	\$3,801,159	\$101,251,366
NextGen Careers	n/a	\$5,794,702	n/a	n/a	\$5,794,702
Disability Determination Services	n/a	\$42,300,750	n/a	n/a	\$42,300,750
Commissioner's Office	\$417,244	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$417,244
<b>Agency Funding Total</b>	<b>\$128,050,716</b>	<b>\$101,623,284</b>	<b>\$11,403,246</b>	<b>\$3,801,159</b>	<b>\$244,878,405</b>



### Funding By Program



### Funding By Source





# Career Services

MassAbility's Career Services team works with individuals with disabilities to explore industries and career paths that suit their interests and professional goals.

Our Career Services team worked together with public colleges and universities, professional training programs, and employers statewide, helping 85% of participants achieve successful employment outcomes through valuable trainings and education.

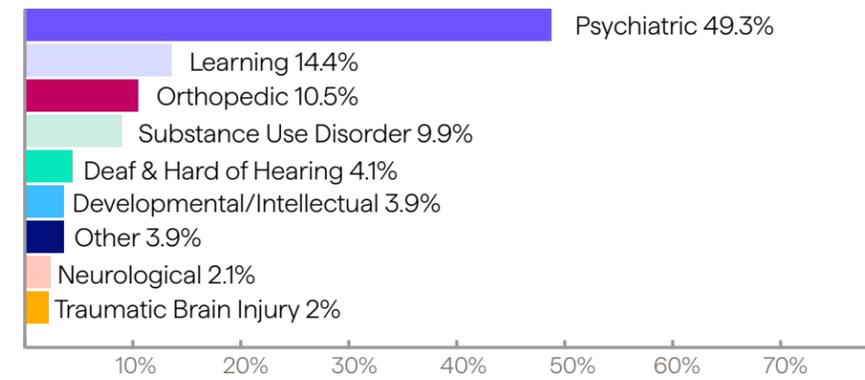
2025 marked the end of the NextGen Careers Program and provided valuable insight to program improvements for participants and staff.

## Service Offerings for Jobseekers

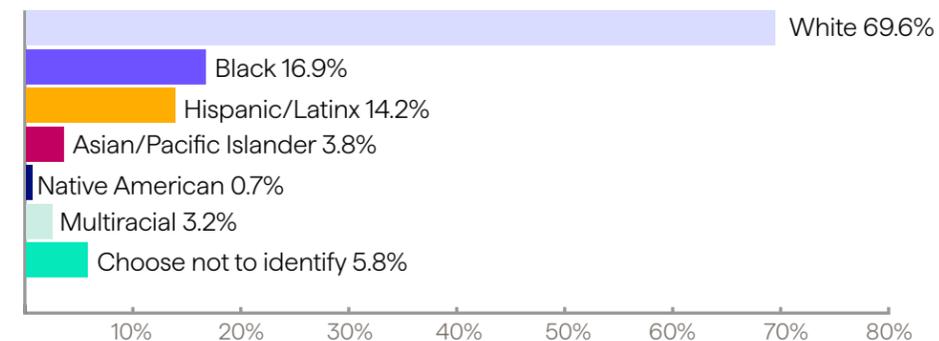
- + Counseling and guidance
- + Job-driven training
- + Interest and aptitude testing
- + Job placement assistance
- + Diagnostic evaluations
- + College or vocational training
- + Assistive technology
- + Financial wellness
- + Pre-Employment Transition Services for students (Pre-ETS)
- + Communication access services: ASL interpreters, oral transliterators, CART, multiple language translation

## By the Numbers

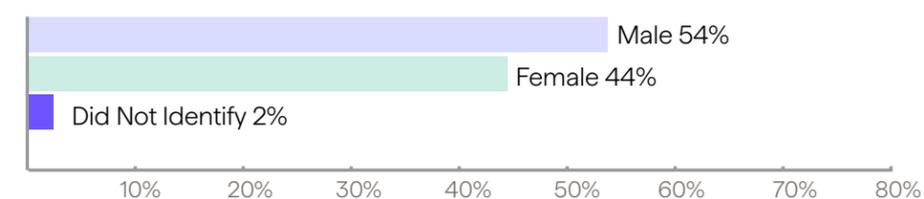
### Type of Disability



### Race



### Gender



**3,274**

Citizens with disabilities were placed into competitive employment based on their choices, interests, needs, and skills.

**\$24.55 million**

The estimated public benefits savings from people placed in MA were **\$24.55 million**.

**\$97 million**

The earnings of these successfully placed employees in MA in the first year were **\$97 million**.

**36.8 years old**

The average age at application is **36.8**.

# Success Starts with MassAbility

In our mission to expand disability employment across Massachusetts, MassAbility is guided by one essential goal: increasing the number of employers who recruit, hire, and retain people with disabilities.

Across industries, employers face persistent recruitment challenges, increased competition for qualified talent, and rising turnover. Inclusive hiring directly addresses these priorities by expanding the talent pool and strengthening employee retention, engagement, and workforce stability.

MassAbility has worked tirelessly to elevate outreach to the Massachusetts business community. We've integrated business services into our overall processes and best practices, ensuring our Career and Business Relations Specialists work collaboratively to deliver a continuum of service for both individual and business customers.



Commissioner Toni Wolf explains,

**“MassAbility is strategically positioned to find dynamic solutions to Massachusetts business workforce recruitment and retention challenges. Listening to the voice of business is essential to understanding workforce needs and challenges. That insight guides how we align services, talent pipelines, and support strategies to meet the evolving demands of employers across the Commonwealth.”**

Inclusive hiring is not a risk—it's a proven workforce solution. People with disabilities represent a skilled, motivated, and underutilized segment of the workforce. Employers who integrate inclusive hiring consistently report higher retention rates, improved productivity, and stronger team stability.

Real-world results reinforce this value: 90% of MassAbility hires are retained after the first 6 months of employment. Greg Martin of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs shared that “of the eight individuals who have come from MassAbility and

completed internships with our organization, all eight have been hired and are still working with us today.”

Courtney Regiannini, talent acquisition partner at Mass General Brigham, notes: “I've worked with a lot of other staffing agencies, and MassAbility really stands out with being able to have their candidates prepared.”

This year, to further expand our employer partnerships, MassAbility developed an employer-focused campaign—“Success Starts with MassAbility”—utilizing public service announcements, targeted messaging, social media, digital platforms, and the “Partners in Possibility” event.

These strategies facilitated direct interaction with business leaders, human resource managers, and talent acquisition professionals, strengthening their understanding of MassAbility's value and workforce development connections.

Through every partnership, MassAbility works closely with employers to understand their needs and align qualified candidates to open roles. By expanding access to employment for people with disabilities, we're building a more stable, productive, and resilient Massachusetts workforce.

## Campaign Performance and Impact:

1.3m+ impressions

62,000 clicks

55,000 print impressions

through the Boston and Worcester Business Journals



## Campaign Insights:

### Mobile Phones

Most people who interacted with the campaign did so on their phone.

### Technology & Manufacturing

professionals with backgrounds in information technology and various technological and mechanical manufacturing fields interacted with the campaign on LinkedIn the most, indicating great interest in alternative staffing agencies and disability employment possibilities.



# Statewide Rehabilitation Council

The SRC is an advisory body that gathers representative voices from the disability community to provide input to MassAbility’s Career Services

The Council’s collective and individual thinking plays a substantive role in how the agency operates and contributes to the innovation of career and counseling services. Members of the SRC collaborate with MassAbility in developing goals and priorities for the state plan, and offer input and consultation on policies, practices, and procedures that impact jobseekers. If you are an employer, individual with a disability, family member, advocate, service provider, and/or someone who wants to make a difference in people’s career-goals, this is the group for you!

**Vision** We envision a world where all individuals with disabilities are supported to live their best lives, through person-driven, meaningful, competitive, and integrated employment and sustainable careers.

**Mission** We work to promote competitive and sustainable employment for all people with disabilities, including those marginalized by inequalities.

## FY25 SRC Members

Matthew Bander  
Disabilities Rep

Youcef J. Bellil  
Disabilities Rep

Kate Biebel  
Deputy Commissioner  
Ex-Officio

Sowmya Sundararajan  
Ex-Officio  
VR Unit Supervisor

Dawn E. Clark  
Labor / Business / Industries

Rebecca Davis  
Parenting Training / Info  
Center Rep

Paula Euber  
Career Services Rep

Naomi Goldberg  
Client Assistance Program (CAP)

Steve LaMaster  
Community Rehab Services Provider Rep

Steve Higgins  
State Independent Living Center Rep

Doug Mason  
Disability Rep

Tay Silveira  
Client / Applicant Seat

Heather Wood  
Dept. of Elementary & Secondary Education

Vacant  
Business/Labor/Industries (3)



## A Letter from the Chair Heather Wood

I am pleased to share the Massachusetts State Rehabilitation Council’s (SRC) Annual Report for FY2025, a year that demanded persistence and thoughtful engagement in our advisory role to MassAbility.

Shifts in federal, state, and agency initiatives directly influenced how the Council approached its work. The year underscored the need for the Council to remain adaptable as these initiatives continue to evolve and affect the delivery of services across the Commonwealth.

Following our partnership with NASHIA in FY2024, the SRC applied our strengthened procedures and awareness of national trends to advance our FY2025 recommendations.

These included a number of things, one was in developing new committee structures to improve efficiency, including a review and redefinition of all subcommittee summaries. The next, we collaborated with MassAbility on adapting to shifts in federal policies and reviewing strategies to market the Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC) to potential employers or agencies and how to support small businesses in utilizing this tax credit.

We also support self-employment strategies for job seekers and strengthened the employment outcomes for recipients of the Adult Community Clinical Services program.

To deepen our partnership with MassAbility, the Council invited Commissioner Wolf to present the agency’s FY2026 priorities. This presentation helped the SRC align its upcoming recommendations with current agency initiatives. The Council will continue to request updates throughout the year to ensure our work remains informed and responsive.

For FY2026, the SRC plans to craft and develop instructional materials for participants utilizing the DETC and advise MassAbility on strategies to market the DETC to participants, vendors, and employers.

We’ll also partner with a MassAbility representative to strengthen self-employment support based on national best practices and advise on strategies to expand resources and knowledge for employers seeking to hire individuals with disabilities in the Commonwealth.

This was a year of important progress as we navigated challenges and adapted to evolving initiatives. Our collaboration with MassAbility has been further strengthened through improved communication, shared presentations, and resource development. As we enter FY2026, the SRC remains committed to collaboration, adaptability, and flexibility during a time of continued change.

I am proud of all we have accomplished together and confident that our efforts will continue to support meaningful impact and positive outcomes in the years to come.

Best Regards,  
Heather Wood  
Chairperson, Massachusetts State  
Rehabilitation Council



# Committee Reports

## REACH Committee

SRC Representative: Douglas Mason

The REACH Committee serves as an executive body to help guide strategic operations within MassAbility. The REACH Committee consults with the Executive Team to explore unique challenges and barriers for collaboration, idea generation, support and creative solutions to assist in advancing agency goals.

### REACH Committee Plan Goals

The REACH Committee assists MassAbility in the implementation of its diversity plan goals. Goals include prioritizing and incorporating strategies within all aspects of internal and external engagement, service delivery, and workplace interactions, ensuring that MassAbility workplaces and technology are fully accessible to all staff.

We are also focused on recruiting and retaining a workforce that reflects the varied backgrounds of our communities, with a focus on veterans, as this is a population where MassAbility has not hit its targeted benchmark in recent

years. We endeavor to ensure that the voice and choice of Individuals that we serve, as well as their family members, are front and center in the design, development and delivery of services and supports. We also strive to improve workplace opportunities for individuals with disabilities by ensuring that individuals with disabilities have the chance to lead at every level.

### Progress

Membership consists of a representative from each Employee Resource Group as well as members of the public. Ideally, this allows for full representation of staff at MassAbility. Through collaboration with management, the Committee developed a Scorecard which is used to assign responsibility to specific individuals in order to monitor progress. It also allows the Committee to prioritize which actions that are necessary for implementation.

Using the census data for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Committee compared the demographic statistics of the Commonwealth to the employee demographics at MassAbility. The is to make sure that the agency's employees are demographically representative of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We then looked at the staff by demographics to determine if focus should be given to underrepresentation within the agency itself.

Historically, veterans have been underrepresented and that

continues to be the case. A concerted and concentrated effort is underway to address this situation. Training has been made available for employees to know and understand the importance of our goals. A major focal point in our work is to make sure that we are providing the best service possible. We distributed a Participant Satisfaction Survey, the Committee analyzed the results, and we are continually addressing concerns raised making an effort to manage the expectations of the population that we serve. This requires an open line of communication between the counselors and the participants. We also plan to develop training materials for our service providers to ensure everyone is on the same page.

The REACH Committee is committed to continued collaboration with MassAbility to successfully implement these goals.

## Executive Committee

Chairperson: Heather Wood

The Executive Committee ensures the Council acts in accordance with federal and state vocational rehabilitation regulations; manages the affairs of the Council in the interim between meetings; reviews the appointment categories the Council has vacant and maintains a list of potential candidates to fill the vacancies; and submits selected candidates for the following year to the Governors for consideration.

Throughout FY2025, the Executive Committee, composed of the Council Chair, committee chairs, and MassAbility staff, focused on enhancing the Council's effectiveness and ensured that its work aligned with MassAbility's priorities.

To support these goals, the Committee strengthened communication with MassAbility staff and engaged in

collaborative planning and information sharing. Additionally, the Committee reviewed vacant appointment categories, maintained a list of candidates for consideration, and is revising committee summaries and objectives to support alignment with agency priorities and Council recommendations. At its monthly meetings, the Committee reviews Council operations, discusses strategic priorities, evaluates emerging issues, and prepares for the full Council's quarterly meetings.

The Executive Committee continues to monitor and respond to ongoing challenges at the federal, state, and agency levels, ensuring that the Council remains adaptable and well-positioned to provide effective guidance to MassAbility.

The Committee looks forward to continuing its work in partnership with MassAbility and other stakeholders to ensure that Council operations remain effective and responsive. By maintaining regular oversight, reviewing emerging issues, and fostering collaboration across committees, the Executive Committee will continue to support the Council in achieving its goals. These efforts also help ensure that the SRC remains a strong and adaptable advisory body, guiding MassAbility in advancing its strategic objectives and providing participants with the resources and support they need to achieve sustainable and fulfilling employment.

## Consumer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee

Chairperson: Heather Wood

The Consumer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee ensures job candidate perspectives are included in the process of



evaluating vocational rehabilitation (VR) or career services. MassAbility and the SRC jointly conduct an annual needs assessment; resultant information and findings are incorporated into the VR section of the Massachusetts WIOA Combined State Plan, strategic planning efforts, and the agency's quality assurance activities. The Committee provides the agency with detailed information regarding the needs of participants served by MassAbility, and fulfills the federal requirements that the agency and the SRC jointly conduct a needs assessment at least every three years. As part of this process, a Consumer Satisfaction Survey is also sent annually to consumers with closed cases to gauge their satisfaction with Career Services received through MassAbility.

The Committee continued to meet bimonthly to review participant experience data, including Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment, as well as staff, business, and provider and vendor surveys. During these discussions, members identified several key areas where participants reported challenges. In response, the Committee developed three formal recommendations for consideration by MassAbility. Two of these, related to

(1) collaborating with community transportation providers to explore opportunities for a more streamlined application and intake process, and (2) identifying strategies to reduce communication gaps between VR counselors and participants, particularly instances of unintentional loss of contact, did not move forward this year. The Committee plans to continue exploring ways to support participants in accessing clear information and resources that strengthen their connection to services.

The third recommendation focused on helping participants better understand what MassAbility can and cannot provide throughout the Career Services process. This aligned closely with a recommendation submitted by the Client Assistance Program (CAP), so the CSNAC will collaborate with CAP and MassAbility in the coming year to develop accessible fact sheets to orient career services participants to available supports and expectations.

Over the next year, the CSNAC intends to review and update its name and mission to better reflect its focus and activities. By continuing to collaborate and examine feedback from participants, staff, businesses, and providers, the Committee aims to help ensure that VR services remain responsive to the needs and experiences of those they support.

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## State Plan and Interagency Relations Committee

Chairperson: Joe Belil



The State Plan and Interagency Relations Committee (State Plan Committee) ensures the SRC meets its obligations regarding input from jobseekers in the development of both the MassAbility public career services/vocational rehabilitation (VR) State Plan and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan.

### Committees Support and Strengthening the SRC Recommendation Process

Throughout FY25, the State Plan Committee played a central role in advancing the SRC recommendation process. Members closely reviewed MassAbility's responses to the FY25 recommendations and assessed the ongoing progress during each State Plan Committee meeting. This work resulted in a finalized FY25 SRC Recommendation document, shared with all members in October 2024.

The committee made it a priority to have thoughtful conversations about community and accessibility, understanding that these values are key to creating recommendations that are both all-encompassing and effective.

### Improved Communication and Planning Strategies

In February 2025, the committee introduced a more efficient, structured approach to communicating recommendations with MassAbility. This included a detailed schedule, clearly defined roles for the State Plan and Annual Reports, and updated guidelines for developing the FY26 recommendations.

To better support these efforts, the recommendation timeline was adjusted to align with the new process, improving coordination and clarity across stakeholders.

### Expanding Community Engagement and Outreach

To strengthen community involvement, the committee once again partnered with the Office of Learning and Community Engagement. Through the Spring Newsletter, MassAbility Participants were invited to share feedback on how career services can better support people with disabilities.

The committee remains committed to improving the SRC recommendation process and ensuring it continues to reflect participant voices and the SRC's and MassAbility's values.

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## Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

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Chairperson: Steve LaMaster

The SRC Business and Employment Opportunity (BEO) Committee is responsible for reviewing, analyzing, and providing guidance to the MassAbility on methods and best practices for employment and employment services.

### Develop practical strategies for sharing work Advise MassAbility on strategies to enhance business and employer awareness of the Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC): a state-sponsored incentive to promote the employment of people with disabilities.

The Committee received reports from MassAbility at three intervals during the year regarding the numbers of people who had gone through the certification process. One of the committee members offered personal experience of having gone through the process.

By the end of the Plan year, there were still well under 100 certified holders of the DETC, generating feedback that greater visibility for the certification would enable a more participation.

The committee generated consensus that producing an "infographic" that described the process for applying for DETC Certification could help in increasing awareness and utilization of the certification.

### Work with MassAbility to involve stakeholders in presenting its finding and discuss a future MassAbility self-employment strategy to support Job Seekers with disabilities in pursuing self-employment career goals.



The committee received three reports from MassAbility on various self-employment efforts, including work with a consultant to identify best practices outside of the Commonwealth of MA. The committee contributed to and supported MassAbility consensus that it would be prudent to work with other states to learn about their effective practices to help the people seeking self-employment. It was noted that there is a lot of self-employment in the state of Vermont, and the laws may differ somewhat there. The committee recommended that MBY emphasize helping participants get ready for self-employment, to enhance the likelihood that self-employment ventures will be successful.



# Home + Community Life



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## Building a life on your own terms

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MassAbility's **Home and Community Life** services empower you to participate in your community and build a better life on your own terms. We partner with you to expand what's possible for adults and youth with disabilities, providing you with the support, technology, and training you need to become self-sufficient. Together, we're breaking down barriers to create a Massachusetts that's truly equitable, accessible, and inclusive.

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### Home and Community Life services

Our programs and services include

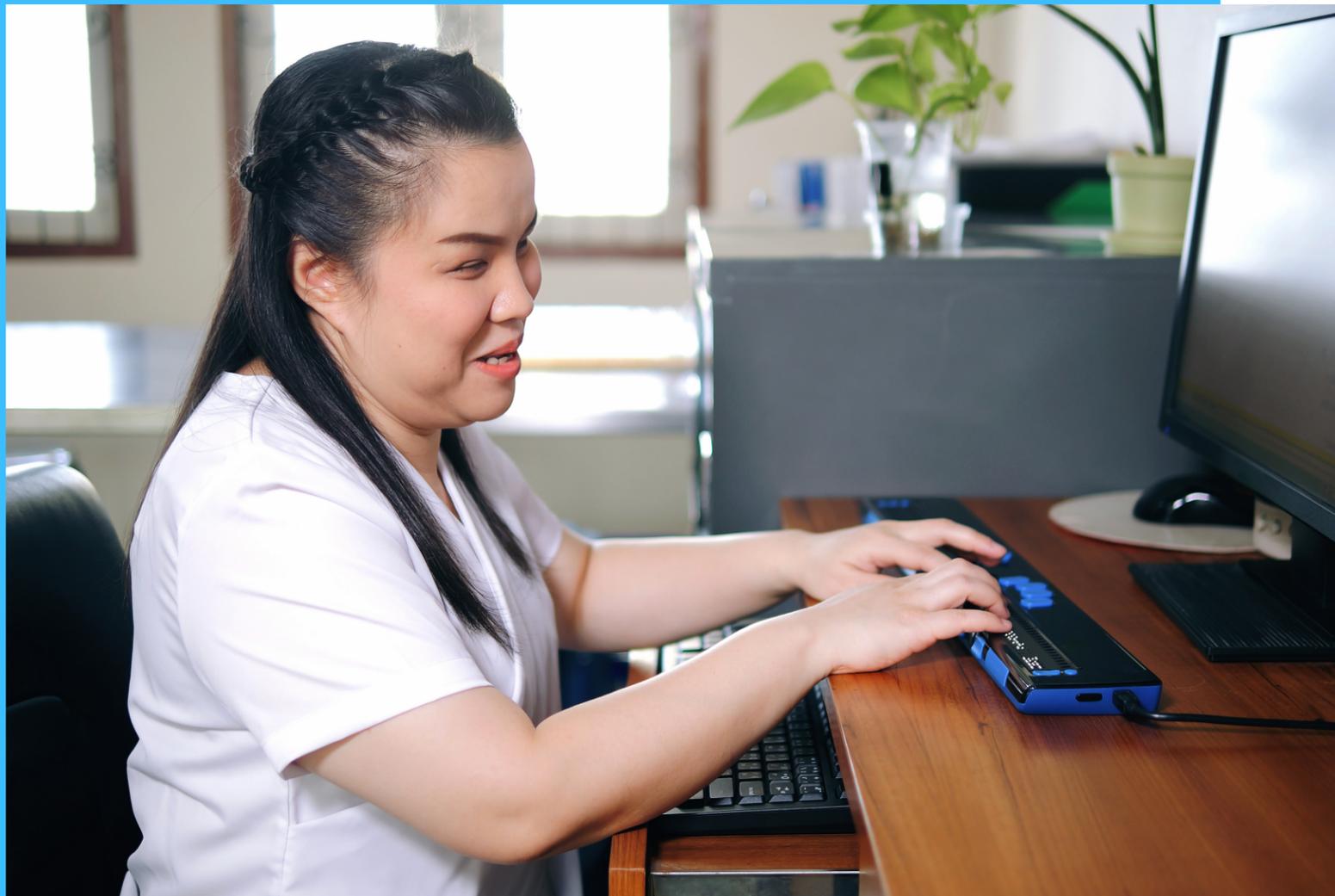
- + Turning 22 youth transition to adult human services
- + Supported living and home care
- + Independent living centers
- + Home modification loans
- + Accessible housing registry
- + Assistive technology training, devices, and resources
- + Community-based residential, day, and support services for people with brain injuries
- + Moving Forward Program

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### By the Numbers

- + **4,214** served by Independent Living Centers
- + **829** served by Turning 22 Services
- + **1,262** individuals received Assistive Technology
- + **331** individuals received Supported Living services
- + **1,224** individuals received brain injury services
- + **1,319** individuals received home care
- + **327** received protective services
- + **1,374** received services from the Moving Forward Program

# Disability Determination Services



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## Opening doors

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If your ability to work is limited because of a disability, **MassAbility's Disability Determination Services (DDS)** division is here to help determine if you are eligible for disability benefits.

You can apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) through the Social Security Administration (SSA). SSA works to assess your situation and eligibility. If you are determined eligible, SSA sends your application to DDS, and we will work with you to gather necessary information, make a determination, and return your application to SSA for you to get the assistance you need.

If you are found to be disabled, you may also be eligible for health care coverage through Medicaid and Medicare. For many Massachusetts residents like you, DDS is part of our team that can improve your quality of life by helping you live more independently.

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### By the Numbers

+ Number of claims processed for individuals applying for SSI/SSDI benefit: **75,241**

+ Number of claims received: **60,305**

+ Claims processed accurately: **95.9%**

+ Number of continuing review claims successfully completed by DDS : **9,921**

+ Number of initial claims processed by DDS: **49,445**

+ Percentage of claims allowed by DDS: **39%**

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### Massachusetts SSI/SSDI Summary

+ Total MA Population: **7.02 million**

+ MA SSI Recipients, 2024: **163,339**

+ MA SSDI Recipients, 2024: **184,939**

+ Annual SSDI Benefits Paid: **\$3.36 billion**

+ Annual SSI Benefits Paid: **\$1.33 billion**

# My INTERNSHIP with MassAbility

**Sarah Malone shares her experience working as the marketing and communications intern at MassAbility and her perspective as a NextGen Careers Participant.**

I started my internship at MassAbility with the Communications team at the beginning of January 2025 after getting support from the NextGen Career Services program, and it turned out to be the perfect fit!

When I first found MassAbility, I was feeling defeated, having a new spinal cord injury, I lost all momentum in my career and recently lost my full-time job. Truly, I did not know where to start, until I saw an ad on social media for the NextGen Careers program, targeted to disabled folks between 18-30. I felt like I had nothing left to lose and I was craving the stimulation of work. I entertained the idea that doing coursework in bed while in pain would be better than simply laying there, and that if I could at least have something positive come out of all that time, it would be worth the effort.

Thankfully, MassAbility matched me up with the most amazing career counselor, Taneisha, who believed in me and encouraged me to try hard and achieve my goals in spite of my worries. I didn't realize how much I had begun to doubt myself after not being able to work. With help, I began to develop confidence in my expertise and my voice. This only fueled

my work ethic as I finally felt empowered to be a leader.

My first step was going back to school to gain the certifications I needed to boost my resume. Like many disabled individuals, I had a non-traditional education experience and only received a GED and some college experience. I had never finished a degree. Eventually, I entered the workforce but began to hit barriers without the right credentials, despite having extensive work experience. This, combined with health issues and a diseased spinal cord, led to a very sudden loss of my jobs and income, and my identity. I love working and building communities and businesses through marketing and communications! That passion was a huge motivator to get myself back to work, but I knew that this time I needed extensive outside support.

Since I joined the program in 2023, I've learned and grown so much. Not just in my skillset and employability, but I've become a more confident and mentally resilient version of myself.

I know now that I am capable of more than I had come to believe. I learned that seeking the best for myself will always be worth the effort and hard work, and that reaching out for help is not a sign of weakness but a sign of strength.



Through my time as an intern with MassAbility's Communications Department, I was able to step into a fast-paced role with a high level of responsibility. I spent the year directing our social and digital communications efforts and took on an outreach role by traveling across Massachusetts to different events. I visited different organizations to film collaborations for social media to amplify our missions as organizations to support the community in our state, and each visit connected me to more people!

I toured Perkins School for the Blind, interviewed local businesses like Boda Borg Boston about designing your businesses to be accessible, and even traveled from one end of the Commonwealth to the other to give talks on panels for youth with disabilities.

Each of these opportunities gave me the chance to network and build bridges between different service providers that I met. It also gave me the chance to reconnect and re-introduce our agency to people who had known us before last year's thoughtful rebrand to MassAbility.

Not only did I work on external communications, but I quickly stepped into the role for the internal staff communications and shouldered the big responsibility of our weekly internal newsletter, provided guidance for digital accessibility efforts, and gave direction on key messaging and partner collaborations between different departments and external organizations or partner providers. I had many opportunities to lead and work with different teams to meet deadlines and deliverables for various projects.

One thing I especially enjoyed was the agency-style work; my previous experience had been with small businesses and coordinating small packages of ad-creatives for other agencies. It's refreshing to work in an agency where the teams are larger, there's more shared responsibility, and I have coworkers who understand the disability experience and are willing to learn. Until MassAbility, I have never had a workplace where I feel respected and trusted for the value I bring to the team and not doubted for my disabilities. I am thrilled to share that I have been hired as the Communications and Marketing Coordinator!

Thank you to everyone who has supported my journey over these years, I am so excited to continue working with you all and to drive forward our mission in the Commonwealth to provide access and resources so that people in our community with disabilities will be able to thrive, and in turn, create a positive impact for everyone who lives and works in Massachusetts.

Expanding equity  
and access for people  
with disabilities.