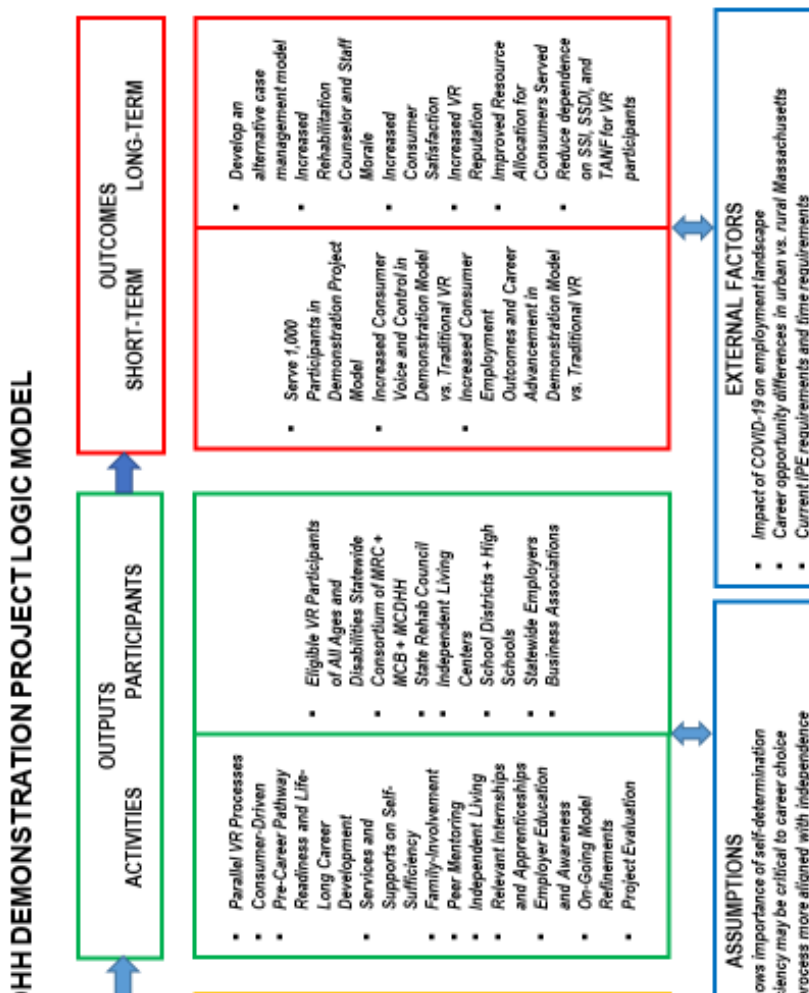**MRC Presentation to the
Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities
Current and Future State**

September 22, 2021

Appendices and Attachments

- **MRC/MCB/MCDHH Demonstration Grant Project Logic Model**
- **Evolution of Career Development Theory**
- **Research**

HH DEMONSTRATION PROJECT LOGIC MODEL

OUTPUTS

ACTIVITIES
- Parallel VR Processes
- Consumer-Driven Pre-Career Pathway
- Readiness and Life-Long Career Development
- Services and Supports on Self-Sufficiency
- Family-Involvement
- Peer Mentoring
- Independent Living
- Relevant Internships and Apprenticeships
- Employer Education and Awareness
- On-Going Model Refinements
- Project Evaluation

PARTICIPANTS
- Eligible VR Participants of All Ages and Disabilities Statewide
- Consortium of MRC + MCB + MCDHH
- State Rehab Council
- Independent Living Centers
- School Districts + High Schools
- Statewide Employers
- Business Associations

OUTCOMES

SHORT-TERM
- Serve 1,000 Participants in Demonstration Project Model
- Increased Consumer Voice and Control in Demonstration Model vs. Traditional VR
- Increased Consumer Employment Outcomes and Career Advancement in Demonstration Model vs. Traditional VR

LONG-TERM
- Develop an alternative case management model
- Increased Rehabilitation Counselor and Staff Morale
- Increased Consumer Satisfaction
- Increased VR Reputation
- Improved Resource Allocation for Consumers Served
- Reduce dependence on SSI, SSDI, and TANF for VR participants

EXTERNAL FACTORS
- Impact of COVID-19 on employment landscape
- Career opportunity differences in urban vs. rural Massachusetts
- Current IPE requirements and time requirements

ASSUMPTIONS
- ...ows importance of self-determination
- ...iency may be critical to career choice
- ...rocess more aligned with independence

MRC/MCB/MCDHH DEMONSTRATION GRANT PROJECT LOGIC MODEL

EVOLUTION OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT THEORY

CAREER THEORY
- Holland's Theory
- Work Adjustment Theory
- Super's Developmental Theory
- Gottfredson's Theory
- Social Cognitive Theory
- Emerging Theories

KEY CONSTRUCTS
- *Personality Types (RAISEC) + Environmental Type (RAISEC)*
- *Congruence = Satisfaction*
- *Needs + Abilities*
- *Satisfactoriness + Satisfaction = Tenure*
- *Life Stages + Developmental Tasks + Life Roles*
- *Self-Concept +Career Adaptability +Career Maturity*
- *Circumscription + Compromise*
- *Vocational Aspirations + Vocational Choice*
- *Self-Efficacy + Outcome Expectations*
- *Choice Model + Performance Model*
- *Understanding Cultural Context*
- *Life / Work Balance*

RESEARCH

"The Right to Make Choices": How vocational rehabilitation can help young adults with disabilities increase self-determination and avoid guardianship (2015)
- People with disabilities who are encouraged and supported to make their own decisions are better employed at higher salaries and more independent. VR supports and services focused on employment-based self-determination and independent living skills can empower young adults with disabilities.

Examining Psychological Self-Sufficiency among African American Low-Income Jobseekers in a Health Profession Career Pathways Program (2020)
- Generated an overarching theme of the relationship influence on generating hope that included four phenomenological categories: (a) staff and instructors' approach to engagement and support with on-going accessibility and close follow-up; (b) experience-based career motivation; (c) hope as the core driver to overcoming perceived barriers; and (d) supportive relationships as key to instilling hope. In addition, it confirmed that the path from perceived employment barriers to economic self-sufficiency was mediated by employment hope. Findings supported the importance of a relationship-based, culturally competent practice to strengthen the PSS process in health profession workforce development among low-income African American jobseekers.

Assessing Readiness for Employment in Vocational Rehabilitation: An Abbreviated Measure (2020)
- VR participants' levels of employment readiness were associated with other important indices of VR success (i.e., job-seeking self-efficacy, job performance self-efficacy, positive outcome expectations, VR engagement).

VR Trends and Forecasting

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission:

Analytics and Quality Assurance Department

Q4 FY2021

FY 2021 Annual Summary

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Introduction

Vocational Rehabilitation caseload information and trends are monitored carefully. Each month, information on status numbers and caseload sizes are extracted from the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Information System (MRCIS) and analyzed, comparing new information to a historical record of over 5-years of caseload trend data. Using these data, the number of consumers in each Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) status are evaluated and performance benchmarks are evaluated. Counselor Caseload Size is also analyzed, monitoring for compliance and the effects of caseload size on service delivery.

The information covered in this report is seen as vital to ensuring productive and efficient service delivery is available to all individuals with disabilities throughout the Commonwealth who seek VR services from the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC). The trends and patterns observed and uncovered by conducting this quarterly analysis provide important information to Agency leadership on the health of the VR program's services.

While month-to-month changes can sometimes be minimal, a quarterly review is conducted in order to observe and analyze broader trends and patterns within changing VR Status and Caseload Sizes.   In order to ensure report continuity and accuracy, all information in this quarterly trends and forecasting report will be extracted from the same source at approximately the same time each month.

In addition to the regular quarterly summary, this report will include an analysis of trends from the whole of FY2021, with the conclusion of the fiscal year occurring on June 30, 2021. This analysis will include examining the past year's performance statewide to the previous FY2020 year's performance.   While many observations and patterns have been found to only differ slightly form quarterly and annual comparisons in the past, important lessons can still be derived from larger sample sizes.

Definitions

Consumer: An individual enrolled in MRC services seeking to obtain competitive Employment.

Vocational Rehabilitation: Services pertaining to assisting an individual in obtaining and maintaining competitive employment in their community.

Status: A term used to denote where in the VR process an individual currently stands.

Referral (Status 00): Potential consumers are referred to MRC VR to begin the potential application process.

Application (Status 02): Referred consumers begin the application process while working with a VR Counselor.

Eligibility (Status 10): An assessment of application materials is completed and consumer is determined eligible for VR Services.

Plan (Status 12): Consumer's Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) is completed and signed, initiating VR services.

Physical/Mental Restoration (Status 16): Consumer is receiving physical and/or mental restoration services to assist them towards achieving their goal in their IPE.

Training/Education (Status 18): Consumer is participating in training and education, including job training or college education/

Job Search (Status 20): Consumer is participating in services aiding them in searching for competitive employment.

Job Placement (Status 22): Consumer is placed into a position within a competitive employment opportunity.

Service Interruption (Status 24): Consumers' services are put on hold due at the discretion of an agreement between a counselor and consumer.

Successful Employment Outcome (Status 26): After placement, consumer has maintained their competitive employment opportunity for at least 90 days and their VR case is closed.

Unsuccessful Outcome (Status 28): Consumers' case is unsuccessfully closed without them holding employment after receiving VR services through an IPE.

Post-Employment Services (Status 32): Short-term supports provided to an individual to help them maintain their employment.

Closure before Eligibility (Status 08): Consumer's case is closed prior to them being found eligible for MRC VR Services.

Closure after Eligibility and Before IPE (Status 30): Consumer's VR case is closed while actively in Status 10, but before completion of their IPE.

Rehabilitation Rate (Employment Rate): A calculated ratio of the number of successful closures to the number of total closures recorded Successful Employment Outcomes.

IPE: An Individualized Plan for Employment defines the goals and associated services required for a consumer to achieve those goals while participating in VR programming.

Early-Stage Status: Includes statues 00 until Status 10. Individuals denoted with these statuses have yet to begin receiving services, and are in the process of applying and being determined eligible prior to their IPE being completed.

Service-Bearing Status: After a plan is established, consumers bear Statuses 12 through 22 while receiving VR services preparing them to begin a job placement.

Closure Status: Consumer cases are closed in Status 08, 26, 28, or 30 when particular conditions are met, ceasing services being delivered to said consumer.

Quarter 4 Summary

During the final Quarter of FY2021, the total number of active consumers fell an additional 350, resulting in a loss of more than 1,000 during the FY2021 period to 16,599 statewide. The number of early stage statuses continued to recover following the impact of the pandemic from Spring 2020 through Winter 2020, slowing the overall loss of the number of active consumers. The number of referrals, and it's increase or decrease, has been and continues to be an accurate gauge of future rates of service delivery. Following the increases in the number of referrals, the number of applications, eligibilities, and plans also continued to recover.

The overall number of individuals receiving services also continued to improve, following the pace of the increase in early-stage VR cases. While there continues to be some fluctuation month to month in the number of cases entering these statuses, the remain trending upward overall. Moving into the Fall, an increase in the number of individuals receiving Education and Training (Status 18) has been observed s expected with the beginning of the school year approaching in August and September. June 2021 recorded the highest instances of these services being initiated since prior to the pandemic.

While the number of Successful Closures, and Closures prior to Eligibility remained level from previous months, the number of Unsuccessful Closures increased by more than 250% in June 2021. This spike is the second largest surge in Unsuccessful Closures experienced in the history of the MRC VR program, and resulted in a sharp decrease in the statewide Rehabilitation rate to 20.5% in June.

Overall, the average caseload size of a VR counselor has decreased to 76 at the conclusion of the Fourth Quarter, with the number of caseloads meeting their size goals rising by more than 20%. The average caseload size continues to vary widely by office and district, but has greatly improved since the beginning of FY2021.

Office Eligibility and IPE compliance continued to rise following a decrease throughout the pandemic period. For the first time since FY2020, the statewide average rate of both Eligibility and IPE compliance has exceeded the 90% threshold; Eligibility compliance rose 3% to 90%, while IPE compliance rose 4% to 91% overall. These figures also represent 2 of the greatest 3-month improvements to compliance rates in the past 5 years.

Overall, the recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue, and evidence of this recovery can be seen in all areas of the VR process. As the environment continues to improve, the situation should be carefully monitored in the event that measures are put in place which again hinder the ability for VR staff to provide services to consumers statewide. However, forecasting using current conditions indicates that the recovery will continue at the current rate, and the number of consumers served, and served successfully, will continue to rise into FY2022.

Moving forward, it will be important to monitor the effectiveness of new and proposed initiatives on obtaining and supporting new/prospective consumers in progressing through the VR process. Initiatives including MRC Connect and the associated Call Center have potential for reducing the number of Closures Prior to eligibility (Status 08) and Unsuccessful Closures (Status 28), and increasing the rate of plan execution and compliance with federal placement goals.

Early-Stage Statuses

Early-stage VR Statuses are those which denote a potential consumer of VR Services as in the process of applying for those services. As outlined below, this includes Referral, Application, Eligibility Determination, and Plan creation. While consumers are designated with these Statuses during at the time of their application onward, they do not actively receive services at this point in time. Early-Stage Statuses are used to determine the services needed for each applicant, and to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that outlines their goals and needs for future services.

Status	Title	Description
Status 00	Referral	Potential Consumers referred for services
Status 02	Application	Potential Consumers apply to receive services with VR Staff
Status 10	Eligibility	Potential Consumers' eligibility for services evaluated by VR Staff.
Status 12	Plan	Consumers develop and accept the terms of their IPE and begin services

Table 1: Description of "Early-Stage: VR Statuses held by potential consumers of VR Services

In the final Quarter of FY2021, the rate of applications, referrals, eligibilities, and plans remained relatively steady when compared to previous quarters' performances. Beginning with a small decrease in all of these statuses to begin the Quarter in April, the number of individuals moving to Application and Eligibility began to rebound with an increase in the total number of referrals.

While the rate of the early-stage statuses has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, the continually constant and small rate of increase indicates that these statuses will remain steady in the near future. Increases in referrals statewide should continue to be closely monitored in

order to determine possible increases or decreases in the number of applications, eligibilities, and plans moving forward. As the new eligibility process continues to evolve under MRC Connect, a detailed examination of the rate of referrals and other early-stage statuses should continue to take placeto determine its efficiency.
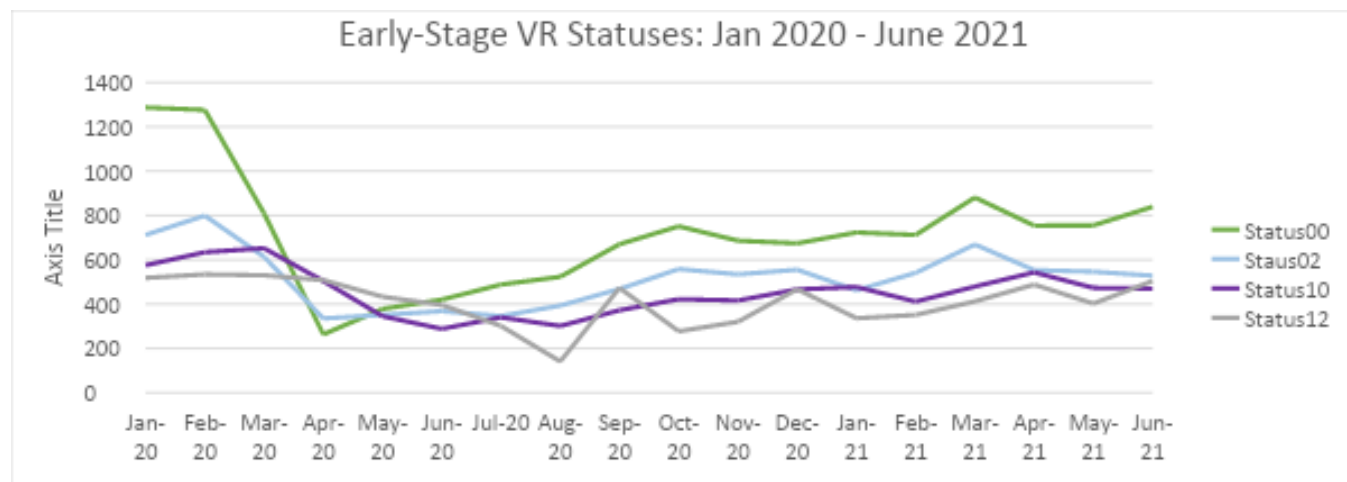
Service-Bearing Statuses

When receiving services actively from MRC VR, consumers hold one of four service-bearing statuses: Status 16, Status 18, Status 20, or Status 22. As outlined in Table 2, each of these hold a particular meaning in the VR Process. Traditionally Status 18 (Education and Training) continues to hold the highest number of active participants of any status in the VR program. These individuals are actively receiving services including assistance with their Secondary Education, including at community colleges, trade programs, traditional universities, and in certificate programs.

Status	Title	Description
Status 16	Restoration	Consumer is receiving physical and mental restoration services
Status 18	Training/Education	Consumers participating in services related to education
Status 20	Job Search	Consumers participating in Job Searching services
Status 22	Job Placement	Consumers participating in Job Placement Services

Table 2: Description of Service-Bearing Statuses held by active VR consumers

Comprising the largest proportion of MRC VR consumers, those participating in Education and Training services make up the largest group of consumers. The rate at which individuals begin to enroll in these services increases leading into the Fall, when school and training programs often begin for the year. During the fourth Quarter, this has also been true. In June, the number of individuals receiving Education related services increased to the highest single-month total since the pandemic began in March 2020, with 488 consumers enrolling in Status 18.

The total number of consumers receiving Restoration services continued to fluctuate through Quarter 4, following the historical trend of being the most un-steady status in terms of monthly

total enrollment. Unlike education and training programs, Restoration services do not typically take place over a specific time period, and are instead reliant upon the consumer's progress. As MRC begins to provide more in-person services as measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be lifted, the number of those receiving these services continues to rise
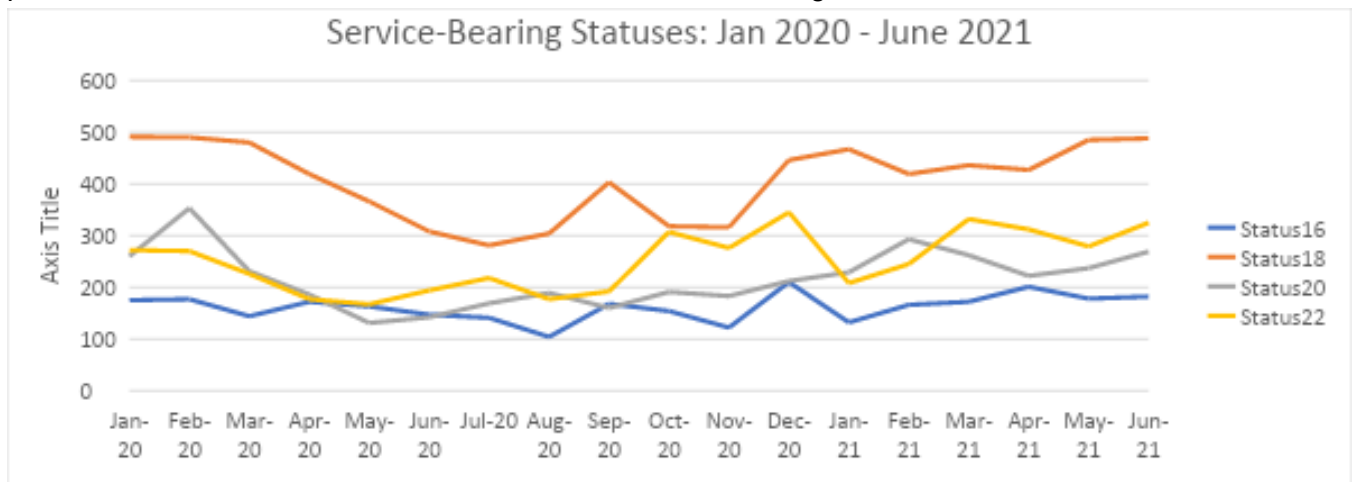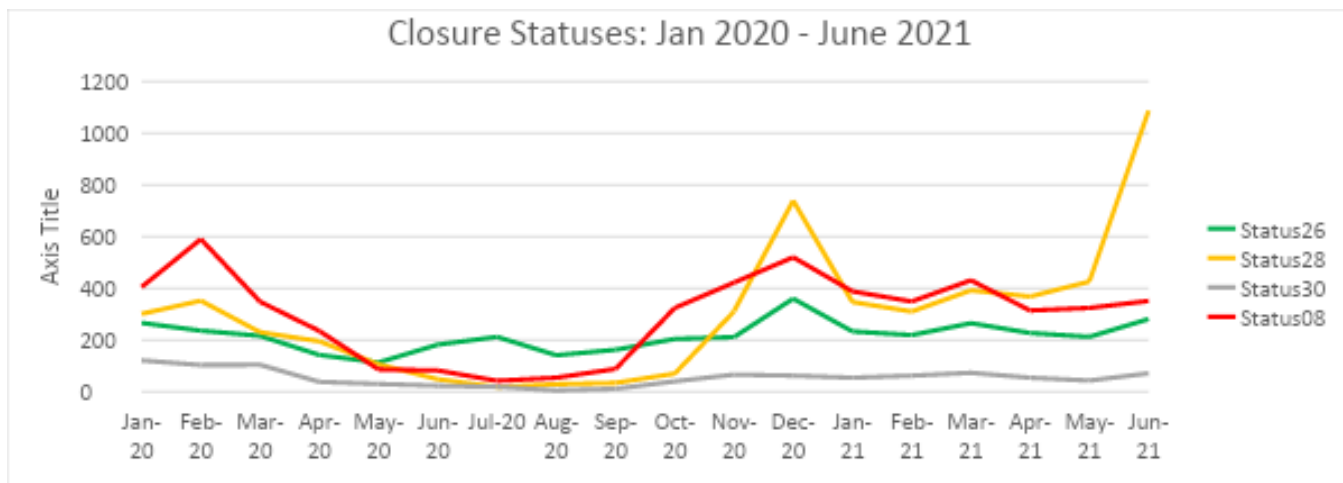

on average.

Closure Statuses

Once a case has met the criteria for closure, or it has been determined by VR staff a case should close, said case can be placed into a closure status. These statuses indicate that an individual is no longer applying or receiving services from MRC VR. Below is a table outlining the closure statuses utilized by VR programming to denote at which point in their service delivery the individual ceased being an MRC consumer or perspective consumer.

Status	Title	Description
Status 26	Successful Employment Outcome	Closure of a Vocational Rehabilitation Case after an individual completing a minimum of 90-days of successful competitive employment
Status 28	Unsuccessful Outcome	Closure of a Vocational Rehabilitation Case after receiving services without an employment outcome
Status 30	Closure After Eligibility & Before IPE	Closure of a Vocational Rehabilitation Case after an individual is determined eligible for VR services but before completion of their IPE.
Status 08	Closure Prior to Eligibility	Closure of a Vocational Rehabilitation case prior to an individual being determined eligible for services

Table 3: Description of Closure-Statuses used to denote VR case closures

Quarter 4 of this year saw the second largest number of closures recorded in the VR program's history, with a majority being attributed to a spike in unsuccessful outcomes experienced in June. While the number of other closures remained relatively steady during the 3-month period, this caused the Rehabilitation Rate to drop significantly to 20.5% statewide in June.

This sudden spike resulted in the largest number of total closures statewide since Quarter 2 of FY2020, and the second highest single-quarter increase in over 10 years. Concluding the quarter with 3,758 total closures, or an increase of 635, resulted in a 20% increase statewide. While sudden overall increase in the number of closures statewide has historically been typically cause by temporary increases in the number of closures prior to eligibility, this increase was solely driven by the 255% increase in the number of unsuccessful outcomes recorded in June.

Caseload Size Monitoring

On a monthly basis, a Caseload Size Monitoring report is conducted in order to track and monitor the average caseload size each VR counselor maintains, and the number consumers in each status they serve at the time the report is conducted. This report is mainly used as a tool to help maintain manageable case numbers for VR counselors statewide. Each type of caseload has s standard caseload size goal: 130 for General, 90 for TPS, RCD, Supported Employment, and Bilingual Caseloads, and 50 for DTA or ACCS Caseloads.

In total, 230 caseloads are being utilized by MRC VR Staff who maintain caseloads of active consumers through all stages of the VR process. Of those, 160 have a caseload at or smaller than their established goals, or 73% statewide. The West District continues to have the smallest average caseload size (71), followed by the North District (72), and the South District (86). Caseload sizes are closely monitored in order to ensure that VR Consumers receive the best possible services from their counselors and other MRC VR Staff, and new policies and procedures are frequently under development in order to maintain reasonable caseload sizes statewide.

Federal Compliance Monitoring

The amount of time that consumers spent in each status is tracked in the MRCIS data system, and federal rules and regulations stipulate the amount of time that may pass at particular times in the VR process. In particular, consumer Eligibility (time between Status 02 and Status 10) should take placed in fewer than 60 days without a waiver, and the time to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) should take fewer than 90 without a waiver.

As of April 1, 2021, an average of 90% of consumers (with or without a waiver) were determined eligible in 60 days or less. The West District had the highest rate of compliance, with approximately 85% of consumers moving from Status 02 to Status 10 in 60 days or less. In total, the overall rate of eligibility compliance has increased by more than 3% since the previous Quarter. In the same timeframe, the rate of consumers having their IPE completed within the 90-day period rose approximately 4% to 91% statewide. The North District continues to hold the highest rate of meeting the 90% threshold for both Eligibility and IPE compliance.

FY 2021 Summary

As the recovery and reopening following the COVID-19 pandemic continues, so does the recovery of the administration of VR services statewide. Significant progress has been made during FY2021, with the rate of individuals being served steadily returning to pre-pandemic levels.

The number of consumers entering all early-stage statuses rose by greater than 58% since July 1, 2020. The number of individuals entering the referral stage of the VR process saw the most significant increase across the course of FY2021, with the total number of consumers entering Status 00 nearly doubling between July 1 and June 30. The 839 referrals recorded in June represents the first month since March 2020 that the number of referrals has exceeded 800, displaying a strong indication of recovery following the large impact of COVID-19 related restrictions.
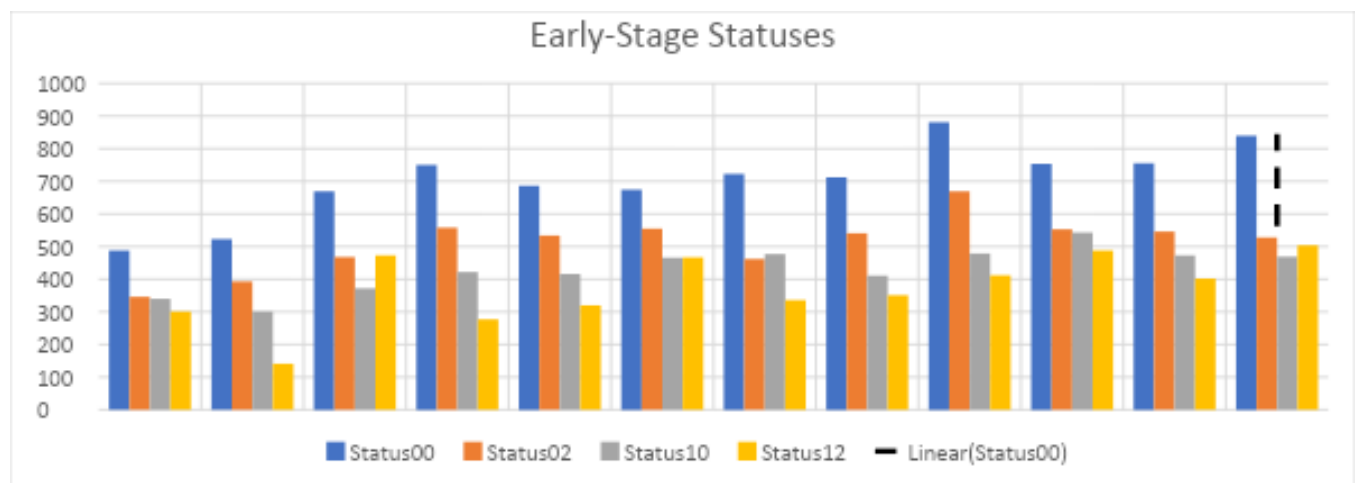
The number of consumers actively receiving VR services also steadily recovered during FY2021. With the number of consumers receiving services increasing by over 50% since July 2020, the number of participating in Education and Training services showed the strongest recovery growing nearly 75% from July 1. While the number of early-stage consumers continues to rice, a slightly delayed, but parallel, increase in service statuses has been observed. As a result of more individuals beginning their VR journey, more individuals will continue to begin receiving services of all kinds.

Service Statuses
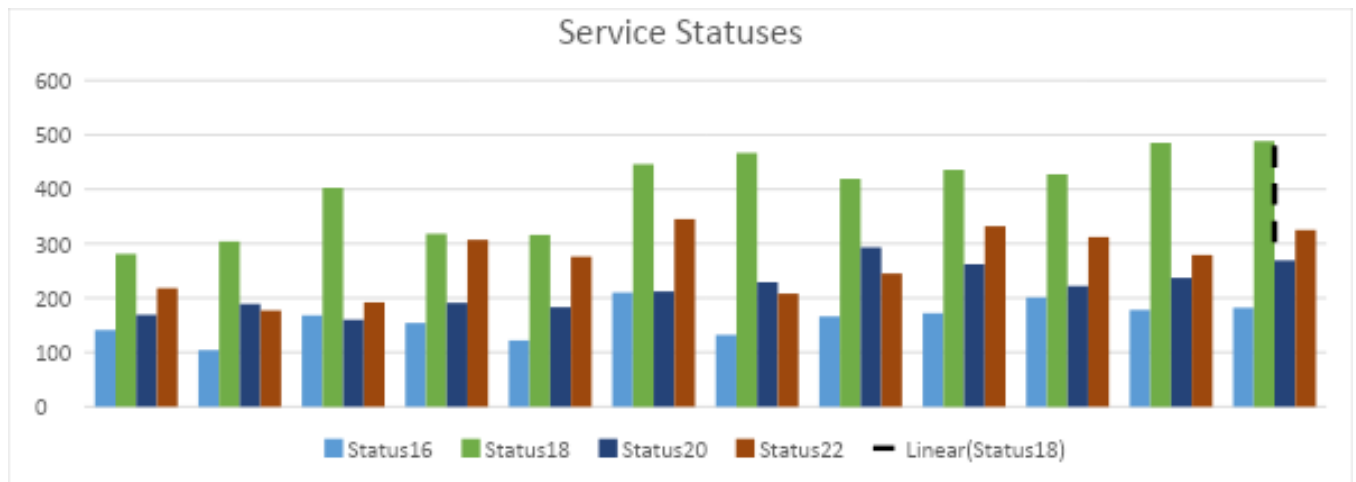
While a pause on Unsuccessful Closures was instituted through the Summer of 2020 and into early Fall, the rate of these closures grew exponentially moving into the end of FY2021. This was paired with an increase in the total number of Closures before Eligibility. However, as the number of Successful Closures did increase exiting the Summer of 2020, they continued to remain steady beyond the Fall. This combination led to a significant decrease in the Rehabilitation Rate statewide, concluding at 39.85% statewide as of June 30, 2021.

Closure Statuses
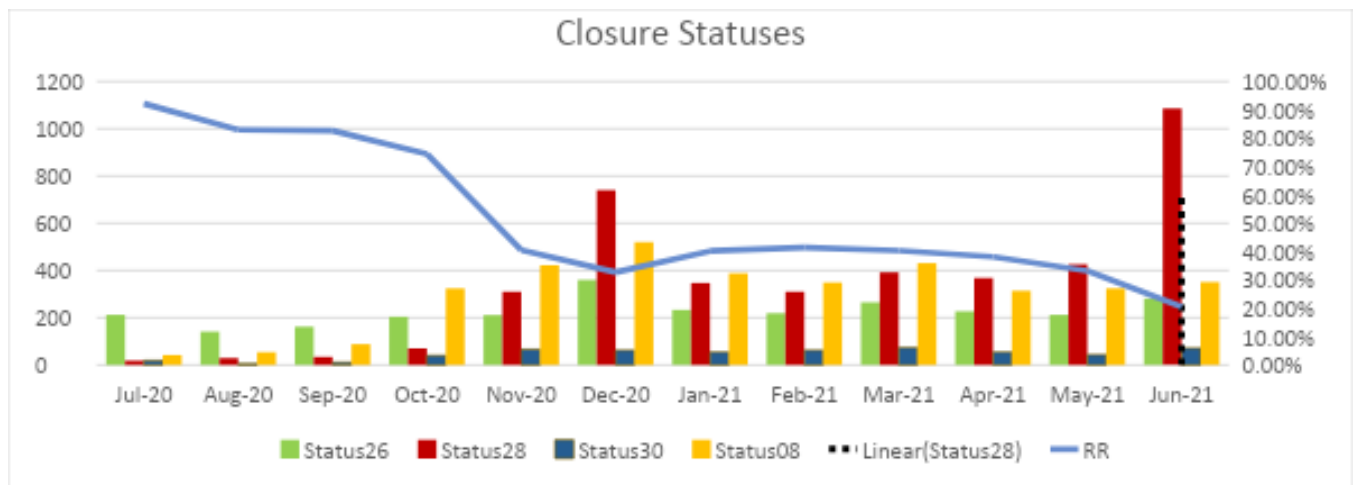
FY2022 Forecasting

Moving into FY 2022, and continuing further into the COVID-19 Pandemic, many circumstances which dictate the number and performance of individuals in the VR programs remain relatively unpredictable.   Using performance data from the past five years, an Exponential Smoothing Forecasting model is used forecast the next 12-months utilizing a 95% confidence interval. This forecasting cannot take into account unexpected events, including pandemic-related shutdowns or environmental events which prevent individuals from interacting with MRC. Additionally, this forecasting does not take into account any additional actions taken as a result of this report, and

presents numbers that would result from a continuation of current practices. The following is a summary of the forecasting produced using the method described above:

Referrals (Status 00)

Moving into FY2022, the number of referrals being made each month are projected to remain relatively steady statewide. However, with the institution of the new MRC Connect program, these figures will need to be closely monitored in order to fully evaluate the execution and effectiveness of the program.
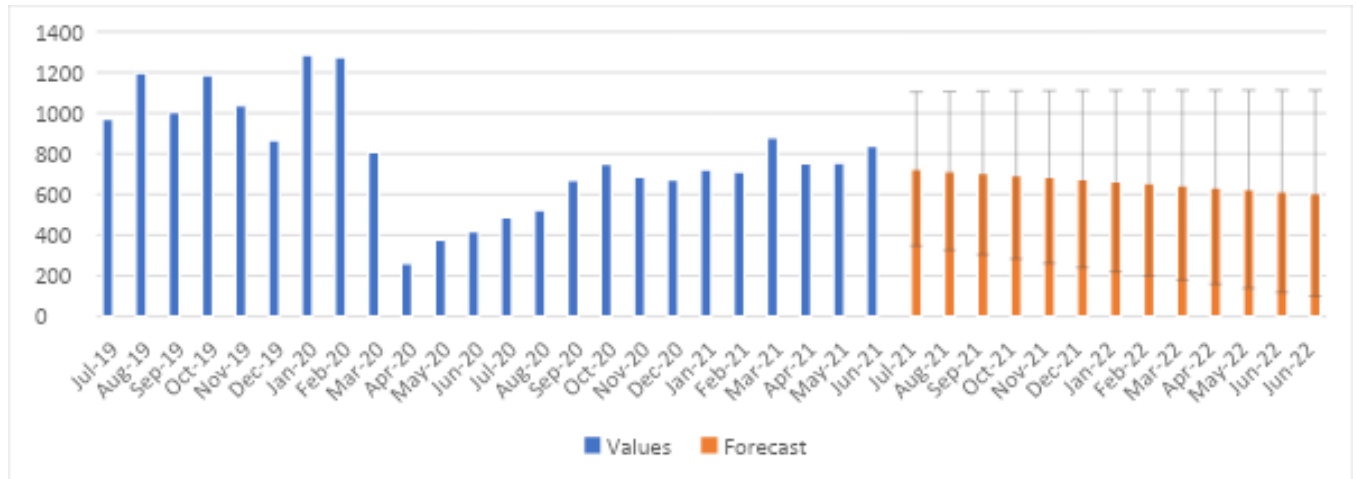

Plans (Status 12)

While the number of monthly IPEs typically holds a pattern of some seasonality, these patterns are expected to continue into FY2022 so long as the reopening post-COVID-19 continues to drive increased interaction between VR Staff and Consumers. The number of plans relies heavily on the number of referrals successfully being made, and should be observed closely.
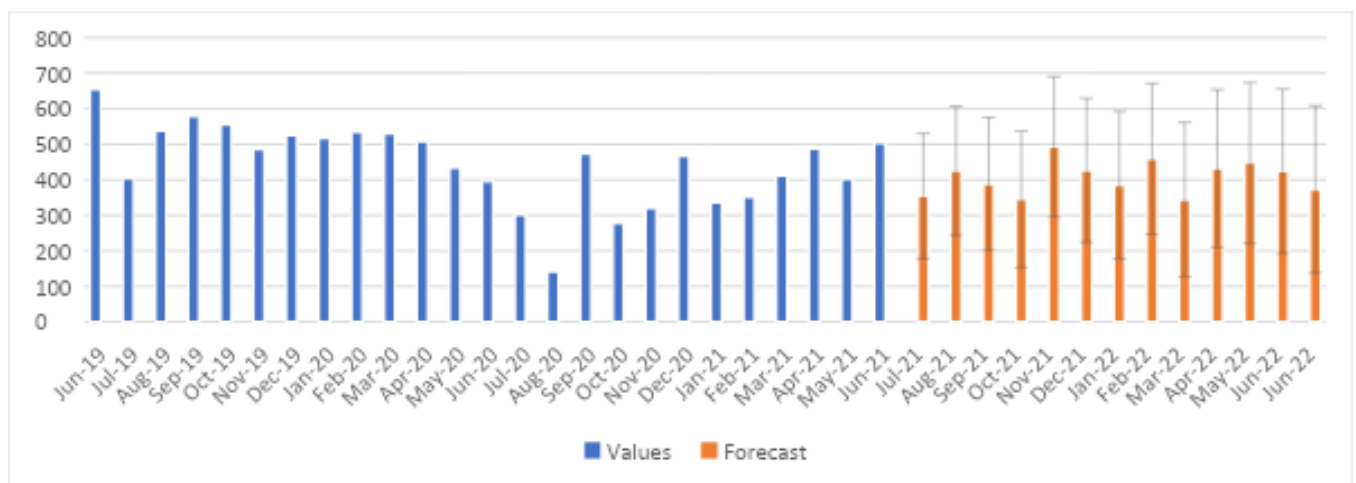
Closure Before Eligibility (Status 08)

While the number of Closures prior to Eligibility increased following the resumption of Unsuccessful Closures, this elevated level of these closures is not expected to fully continue moving into FY2022. This closure type can be unpredictable in terms of the number of instances each month, and should continue to be monitored moving forward.
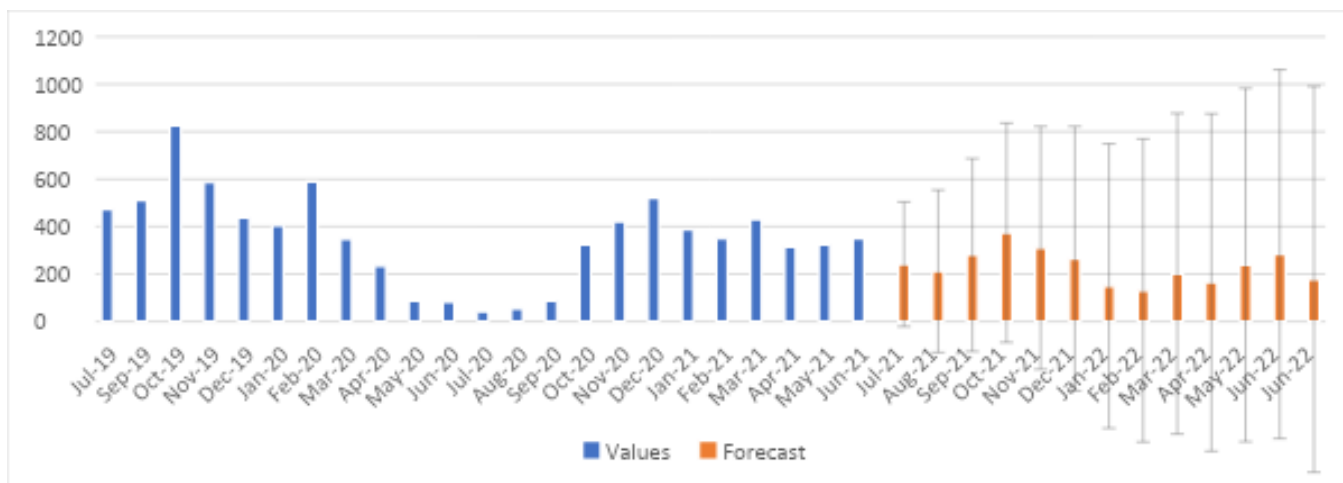
Successful Employment Outcome (Status 26)

As the recovery from the pandemic stay-at-home orders continues to unfold, the number of Successful Closures is forecasted to continue increasing to levels experienced prior to the pandemic. As a seasonal trend has been observed with this closure type, that pattern is expected to continue to some extent.
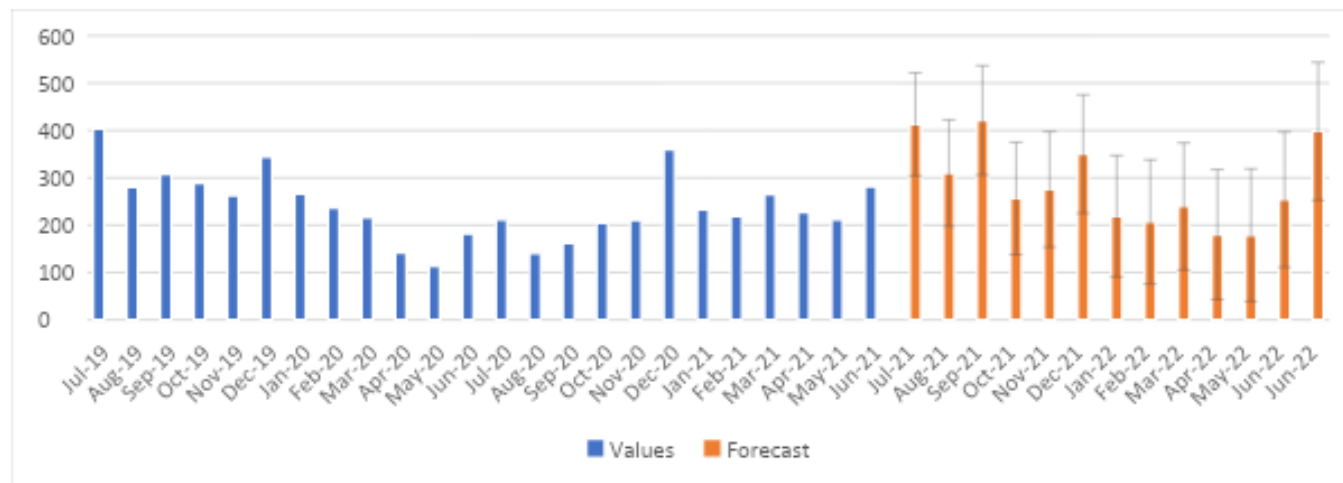

Unsuccessful Outcomes (Status 28)

As the number of Unsuccessful Closures has historically been highly unpredictable, it is difficult to forecast the monthly number of these closures far into the future. However, it is predicted that the number of Unsuccessful Closures will remain elevated, at least into the near future.

Rehabilitation / Employment Rate

Being the primary measure of the proportion of Successful Employment Outcomes to the total number of closures after placement, the Rehabilitation Rate (Employment Rate) falls in parallel with the forecasts of the number of Successful and Unsuccessful Outcomes as stated above. Increased rates of Status 28 closures, paired with steady numbers of successful closures, suggest that the rehabilitation rate will remain below the 55% goal moving into FY2022.
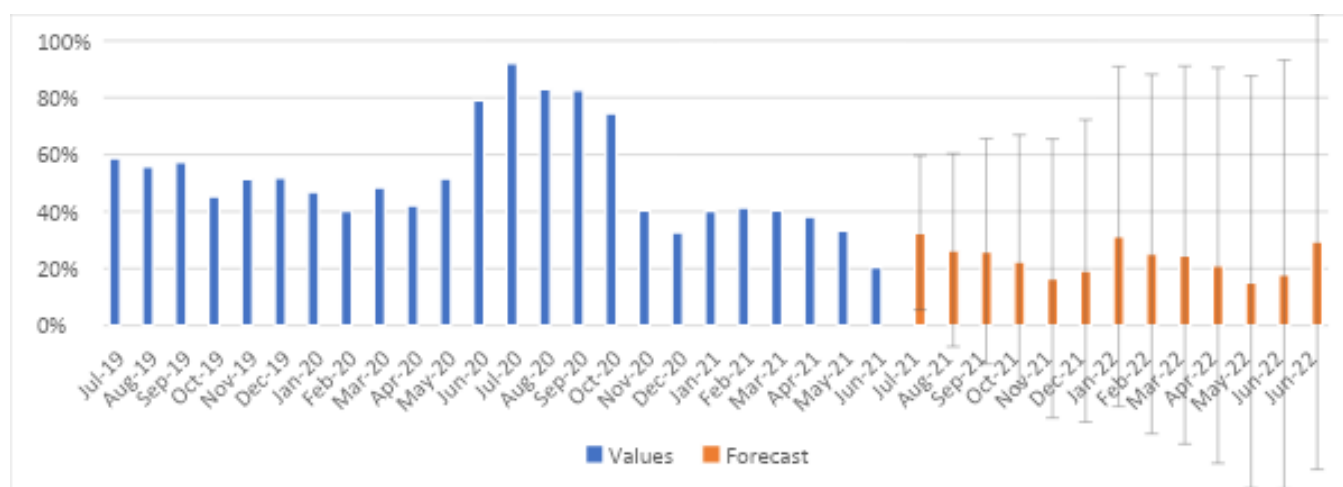
Recommendations

Based on the observations and forecasting described in this report, several action steps are recommended in order to ensure continued progress and consumer success with MRC VR programming statewide. The recommendations made in this report at based on point-in-time information and are subject to change based on future program results and analysis. It is important to note that these recommendations are made with current environment and circumstances taken into account, and may potentially change with a changing environment. While conditions statewide remain volatile as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, several recommendations can be made which we believe to be equally as effective now as they would be in a traditional climate. These recommendations involve the further analysis of existing programs, and increased implementation of best-practices derived from MRC pilot programs and cross-agency initiatives:

1. Focus on reducing the number of unsuccessful closures, particularly closures prior to eligibility (Status 08) and Unsuccessful Outcomes (Status 28) should continue

moving forward. While Quarter 3 was observed to have a higher-than-expected unsuccessful closure count following the conclusion of the hold on these closures, a higher-than-average count of unsuccessful closures is expected to continue. In order to remain proactive in increasing early-stage consumer success, several actions can be taken:

a. In order to produce more concrete and specific recommendations, we propose a taskforce be established to further evaluate the specific reasons behind the high rate of Unsuccessful Outcomes specifically (Status 28). It has been observed that these closures are not evenly distributed across the state, and best practices to decrease the rate of this closure type should be investigated in order to provide all staff with training on these practices.

b. Examination of several existing VR programs with significantly lower rates of unsuccessful closures, particularly the DMH ACCS partnership program, the TPS program, and the now complete Kessler Foundation Grant. With higher rates of success being recorded in these programs and within different offices, analysis and observations may produce best-practices that can be implemented on a larger scall throughout the VR program.

c. Examination and monitoring of monthly data and trends should be continued. We remain in unprecedented and volatile times as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but important lessons on how to better engage with consumers and maintain consumer relationships can be explored. Strategies surrounding community engagement and consumer communication should continue to be adjusted and recorded to promote consumer success, especially prior to eligibility determination (Status 10) as closures prior to this point represent the largest proportion of unsuccessful closures in the VR program.

2. Implementation of programs including MRC Connect and OneMRC should continue to be closely monitored and evaluated. With the potential of increasing the effectiveness of information/referral/application for services, frequent analysis and adjustment may be required. Paired with implementation of best practices taken from other programs as indicated in recommendation 1, a reduction in the number of closures prior to eligibility should continue to be targeted. Close cooperation between MRC Connect staff and AQA will be required in order to effectively produce up-to-date analysis and recommendations using the most current information available.