

# POLICY BRIEF: CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENHANCING THE EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN MASSACHUSETTS

This brief outlines policy considerations to enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities in Massachusetts. It draws from enacted state policies, including executive orders and legislation, as well as disability employment initiatives adopted in other states since 2016. The examples included are for internal reference only and not intended for public distribution.

## Policy Options

States across the country are seeking practical, cost-effective ways to strengthen their workforces and economies and reduce long-term reliance on public benefits. As employers continue to face labor shortages, expanding workforce participation by fully leveraging the skills and talents of all Americans, including people with disabilities, has become paramount.

This brief outlines policy considerations in seven key areas and reflects approaches already in use across multiple states to increase workforce participation, support employers, and improve government efficiency. Together, these policy considerations offer Massachusetts leaders a flexible, results-driven set of strategies that can be tailored to the state's unique workforce and economic priorities.

- ✓ **Setting the Groundwork**: Policies that increase the likelihood of successful implementation of targeted disability employment efforts.
- ✓ **State as a Model Employer of People with Disabilities**: Policies that facilitate increasing the representation of employees with disabilities in government agencies.
- ✓ **Career Readiness and Economic Mobility**: Policies that facilitate career readiness and work-based learning (WBL) opportunities for individuals with disabilities (including youth and young adults) that both align with education and career development plans and meet state and local workforce needs.
- ✓ **Behavioral Health at Work**: Policies that support employment and retention of individuals with mental health conditions or substance use disorders and encourage employment of people with disabilities to address the behavioral workforce shortage.
- ✓ **Stay-at-Work and Return-to-Work**: Policies that bolster retention of employees in the event of injury or illness (on or off the job) or change in status of an individual's disability.
- ✓ **Private-Sector Engagement**: Policies that build capacity of private- and nonprofit-sector employers to recruit, hire, train, and retain disabled workers.
- ✓ **Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment**: Policies that encourage development and support of disability-owned businesses (including disabled veteran-owned businesses).
- ✓ **Interagency Coordination and Collaboration**: Policies that enable workforce system coordination and collaboration to optimize resources and service delivery and help individuals with disabilities achieve meaningful employment.

An **Appendix** with additional examples from other states can be found on page 28.

---

## Setting the Groundwork

---

While disability employment efforts can take many forms, one constant remains: building a culture of respect creates the foundation for lasting and meaningful change. People with disabilities bring valuable contributions to the workforce and to America's communities, and state and local governments have an exciting opportunity to champion their full participation. States can set the groundwork for engagement by promoting disability awareness of all types of disabilities, apparent and non-apparent, through etiquette training, public awareness campaigns, and the adoption of appropriate language in legislation, regulations, and policy guidance. Policy considerations include:

- ✓ **Establish a dedicated disability employment office or senior coordinator position** responsible for developing and implementing statewide strategies to improve the recruitment, hiring, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities.
- ✓ **Provide employees with disability awareness and etiquette training** and encourage private-sector employers to adopt similar training programs to foster welcoming workplaces.
- ✓ **Develop statewide public awareness campaigns** that highlight the contributions of people with disabilities.
- ✓ **Require state agencies to adopt appropriate language** in all statutes, regulations, and public communications, replacing outdated or insensitive terminology.
- ✓ **Embed disability engagement into broader workforce efforts.**

### ***Massachusetts Policies and Practices Related to Setting the Groundwork***

#### **Establish a Dedicated Disability Employment Office or Senior Coordinator Position**

- [SB 2963](#) (2020) established a permanent commission on the status of people with disabilities, which is tasked with studying and advising on the status of transportation for people with disabilities, including to access employment opportunities; establishing school-to-work activities for transition-aged youth with disabilities that engage family members (among other stakeholders); and promoting and facilitating collaboration among local disability commissions and disability employment service providers.
- Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker signed [Executive Order No. 598](#) (2022), which reaffirms and reconstitutes a rehabilitation advisory council for the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind. The council is tasked with evaluating the success of state employment programs and outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving vocational rehabilitation services, with consideration of the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with such employment outcomes.
- [HB 4047](#) (2014) established a Commission on Autism, which consists of representatives from the Department of Education, the Department of Labor and Workforce, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, the higher education and community college systems, and more. The Commission on Autism was tasked with investigating the range of services and support necessary for people with autism spectrum disorder to achieve their full potential, including around education, employment, and behavioral and mental health services.

- [MOD](#) was created in 1981 under [Chapter 6, Section 185 of the Massachusetts General Laws](#). Massachusetts General Law Chapter 6, Sections 185-189 establishes MOD and outlines its mission to “bring about full and equal participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of life in a manner that fosters dignity and self-determination.” Through Executive Order No. 592, MOD is established as the executive branch’s designated ADA and Rehabilitation Act Coordinator responsible for advising, overseeing, and coordinating compliance with state and federal laws protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.
  - One of the goals of MOD is to increase awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities. It also helps cities, towns, places that serve the public, and state government agencies understand their accessibility obligations. MOD provides information and guidance to help Commissions on Disability (CODs) get started, understand their roles and responsibilities, and reach their goals. MOD is the lead technical advisor for local CODs. However, MOD is not an enforcement agency.
  - MOD created a [Disability Handbook for the Executive Branch](#). The handbook covers accessibility, accommodations, trainings, and other disability related policies and procedures.
  - MOD also publishes an [Annual Report](#) on efforts by the office.
  - MOD offers a [Municipal Americans with Disabilities Act Grant](#) program to support capital improvements specifically dedicated to improving access for persons with disabilities. MOD wants to work with communities to realize their ADA Title II obligations and engage in an interactive process so that municipalities can better understand and achieve increased access and opportunities for persons with disabilities.
- The Massachusetts Disability Task Force on Employment was formed in May of 2008 to take a critical look at the executive branch’s policies and practices and to research best practices in the public and private sectors as they pertain to attracting, hiring, promoting, and retaining people with disabilities. The goal of the task force is to make the executive branch a model employer by implementing policies and practices that welcome people with disabilities of all ages as valuable contributors to the workforce.
- The [Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council](#) (MDDC) is an independent agency funded by the Federal Government dedicated to empowering people with developmental disabilities and their families to enjoy full, productive lives by promoting self-sufficiency, community engagement, and opportunity.
- The [Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination](#) (MCAD) is the independent state agency that enforces the Commonwealth’s anti-discrimination laws by investigating complaints of discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and other aspects of everyday life. MCAD also offers remedial and preventative training and publishes resources online such as model policies, posters, and guides.
- The [Governor’s Commission on Intellectual Disability](#) was established in 1993 as part of a final court order issued by Judge Joseph Tauro. The commission is an independent citizen oversight body consisting of 13 members appointed by the governor for a term of three years. The commission was provided with a comprehensive scope and purpose

including the ability to review public policy in the area of intellectual disability, as well as analyzing and identifying systemic areas of concern affecting the human service delivery system within Massachusetts.

- [Massachusetts Commission for the Blind \(MCB\)](#) provides the highest quality rehabilitation and social services to individuals who are legally blind. This includes providing employment-related services to eligible participants of the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program.
- [MassAbility](#) provides services that break down barriers and empower people with disabilities to live life on their own terms. Their programs focus on training and employment, community living, and disability determination for federal benefit programs.

### **Provide Employees with Disability Awareness and Etiquette Training**

- In Massachusetts, all state agency staff must attend [disability awareness training](#), disability in the workplace and intro to digital accessibility.

### **Develop Statewide Public Awareness Campaigns**

- Massachusetts [General Law Chapter 6 Section 15LLLLL](#) states the governor shall annually issue a proclamation setting apart the month of October as Disability History Month to increase awareness and understanding of the contributions made by persons with disabilities. Appropriate state agencies, cities, towns, public schools, and colleges and universities shall establish programs designed to educate and promote these objectives.
- As part of the [Massachusetts Workforce Strategy](#), the Healey-Driscoll Administration is launching a Lead by Example strategy which includes a campaign to encourage private-sector employers to train and hire new, untapped talent especially focused on individuals with disabilities and veterans.
- In Massachusetts, the "[Count Me In](#)" campaign led by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts promotes the hiring of people with disabilities through employer toolkits, storytelling, and coordinated outreach during hiring initiatives and National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

### **Require State Agencies to Adopt Appropriate Language**

- In 2023, the Healey-Driscoll Administration filed legislation to rename the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) MassAbility, reflecting a modern, person-first approach to disability policy. Enacted as [Chapter 205 of the Acts of 2024](#), the law not only established the new name but also updated dozens of state statutes to replace outdated terms such as "handicapped" and "sheltered employment" with more contemporary language. The change underscores the state's commitment to recognizing the capabilities of individuals with disabilities and to advancing job training, career pathways, and workforce participation that promote independence and economic opportunity.

### **Embed Disability Engagement into Broader Workforce Efforts**

- Governor Charlie Baker enacted [Executive Order No. 561](#) (2015) establishing a state task force on economic opportunity for populations facing chronically high rates of unemployment, including persons with disabilities and recently returned veterans. The

task force is intended to advise the governor and is mandated to develop strategies to improve economic opportunities for discouraged populations.

### **Policy Pulse Check: Setting the Groundwork**

State policymakers may want to review implementation of current practices, including those described above, to identify opportunities to expand and enhance existing policies and programs, including:

- ✓ Establish a dedicated disability employment office or senior coordinator position responsible for developing and implementing statewide strategies to improve the recruitment, hiring, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities in the workforce.
- ✓ Develop statewide public awareness campaigns that highlight the contributions of people with disabilities.
- ✓ Require state agencies to adopt appropriate language in all statutes, regulations, and public communications, replacing outdated or insensitive terminology.

Policy options adopted by other states related to setting the groundwork that Massachusetts **may want to explore** include:

- ✓ Provide employees with disability awareness and etiquette training and encourage private-sector employers to adopt similar training programs to foster welcoming workplaces.
- ✓ Embed disability engagement into broader workforce efforts.

---

### **State as a Model Employer of People with Disabilities**

---

State governments can lead by example—and strengthen their own workforce—by becoming model public-sector employers of people with disabilities. State governments are usually among the largest employers in their regions, so they have a significant role to play in demonstrating and promoting best practices in the recruitment, hiring, and retention of people with disabilities through their own employment policies. State and local governments can adopt policies that help facilitate increasing the number of employees with disabilities in government agencies. Policy considerations include:

- ✓ **Develop a strategy** to increase state employment opportunities for people with disabilities, drive coordination among stakeholders, and communicate the state's commitment to disability employment opportunities (e.g., enact policies with a clear plan of action).
- ✓ **Establish a governance and accountability structure** to coordinate SAME implementation, track progress toward identified objectives, spearhead interagency alignment efforts, and take responsibility for continuous improvement of partnerships and programs.
- ✓ **Implement recruitment and hiring initiatives** (e.g., hiring authorities, appointment lists, trial work periods, apprenticeships, and paid internship opportunities) to facilitate employment of discouraged workers, such as workers with disabilities.

- ✓ **Ensure workplace accessibility and universal design** in virtual and physical government spaces (e.g., facilities, job applications, online systems, and other governmental environments).
- ✓ **Provide skills training** for new and incumbent employees to incorporate work-based learning and on-the-job training into state government talent development strategies.
- ✓ **Model SAME best practices** for the private sector, including improved reasonable accommodation offerings, disability awareness and etiquette training, and sharing of best practices around the employment of disabled people.

### **Massachusetts Policies and Practices Related to State as a Model Employer**

#### **Develop a Strategy**

- The Massachusetts Disability Task Force on Employment published a [strategic plan](#) (2009) that is entirely devoted to implementing SAME policy. Elements of the plan include, but are not limited to, increased recruitment efforts, expanded state agency internship opportunities, streamlined reasonable accommodation processes, use of universal design principles in the workplace and disability awareness training for state personnel.
- As part of the [Massachusetts Workforce Strategy](#), the Healey-Driscoll Administration is launching a Lead by Example strategy managed by the Human Resources Division (HRD) to train and hire new populations including individuals with disabilities and veterans.

#### **Implement Recruitment and Hiring Initiatives**

- Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick signed [Executive Order No. 478](#) (2007), which was revoked and superseded by [Executive Order No. 526](#) (2011) and [Executive Order No. 592](#) (2020). Massachusetts strengthened the Executive Order by requiring that hiring goals be incorporated in employment guidelines for the executive branch and ensured follow through by utilizing the [Massachusetts Office on Disability](#) (MOD). The Executive Order establishes that MOD shall be responsible for advising, overseeing, and coordinating compliance with state and federal laws protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and act as the state Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator. Per the Executive Order, each agency was also tasked with appointing an ADA/Rehabilitation Act Section 504 Coordinator who shall report directly to the agency head and work with MOD concerning issues involving persons with disabilities.
- In 2024, the Massachusetts Legislature enacted [Chapter 221](#), authorizing the Town of Truro to establish a volunteer service exchange program for individuals with disabilities and members of their households. The program allows qualified participants to volunteer their time in municipal roles and receive up to \$1,500 annually in property tax reductions, with credits calculated at the state minimum wage. While the benefit is not considered wages for tax or employment purposes, the law effectively creates new pathways for civic engagement, skill-building, and workforce participation for people with disabilities. By recognizing volunteer service as a meaningful contribution to the community, Chapter 221 broadens the concept of work, helping participants strengthen professional experience, community ties, and financial stability outside of traditional employment models.

- In 1983, the Massachusetts Legislature amended the Fair Employment Practices Law to prohibit discrimination in employment on the basis of “handicap.” The standards governing employment practices with regard to “handicapped” persons are part of the statutory and regulatory framework governing fair employment practices under [Mass. Gen. L. ch. 151B](#) and [Mass. Regs. Code tit. 804](#), § 3.00 et. seq. These guidelines are issued pursuant to Mass. Gen. L. ch. 151B, section 2.
- In accordance with [General Law Chapter 31, section 26](#), veterans are given preference on the eligibility list of civil service positions in the following order: disabled veterans, veterans, spouses, or single parents of veterans who were killed in action or who died from a service-connected disability.

## **Ensure Workplace Accessibility and Universal Design**

- Massachusetts operates a [Reasonable Accommodation Capital Reserve Account](#) designed to supplement existing agency resources. Established in fiscal year 2009, state agencies may make requests for supplemental funding for accommodations to the Massachusetts Office of Disability and Office of Access and Opportunity, which are evaluated. Funding can only be used for capital expenses. Funds are then disbursed until the reserve account is exhausted for the current fiscal year. In past years, between \$100,000 and \$150,000 has been made available to supplement state agency budgetary resources.
- Each executive agency houses an [ADA Coordinator](#) to help them comply with the ADA and other disability rights laws. Individuals can work with ADA coordinators to seek accommodations or report disability-related barriers.
- Governor Maura Healy issued [Executive Order No. 614](#) (2023) creating a new [Digital Accessibility and Equity Governance Board](#), the position of Chief IT Accessibility Officer (CIAO) located in the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security (EOTSS), and appointing Accessibility Officers within each Executive Office. The purpose of the board is to strengthen and advance digital accessibility within the Commonwealth. The board shall advise the EOTSS Secretary and the CIAO on all aspects of digital accessibility, including but not limited to: the establishment, adoption, and maintenance of digital accessibility standards, guidelines and policies; the development of strategies and platforms to promote best practices for digital accessibility; the development, in consultation with other executive branch offices and agencies, of procurement policies, contractual standards, and other related documents to promote digital accessibility; and the consideration of federal funding opportunities for digital accessibility priorities.
- Massachusetts issued ["Executive Department Telework Policy" \(revised 2020\)](#) to promote a hybrid work model consisting of a combination of telework and in-office work where statutorily permissible and operationally feasible.
- [Massachusetts](#) provides accessibility contract language required in any solicitations issued by executive department agencies for new systems or major upgrades of existing systems. The language includes:
  - Mandatory vendor compliance with the state’s Enterprise Information Technology Accessibility standards and MassIT Web Accessibility Standards, Version 2;

- Coordination between a vendor and state agency in identifying and providing accommodation to “all prospective attendees at [the vendor] training” who may require accommodation;
  - A list of specific assistive technology (including class, brand and version) and specific desktop configuration “against which [vendor’s] deliverables will be tested under this agreement”; and
  - Required cooperation between the vendor and the agency in resolving interoperability problems that arise during the term of the maintenance agreement, as qualified.
- In March 2021, MOD convened an [Information Technology/Assisted Technology Working Group](#) originating from the EOTSS and the Executive Office of Administration & Finance with the objective of improving accessibility and consistency in accessibility practices in Commonwealth IT resources.
- The [Assistive Technology Independent Living Program](#) (AT-IL) is a program of MRC’s Community Living services. Its goal is to improve the ability of people with significant disabilities to live independently through the use of assistive technology. It helps provide AT assessments, buy and set-up equipment, train, and follow-up.
- The [MCB Assistive Technology \(AT\) for the Blind](#) program provides adaptive devices and technical consulting to individuals who are blind, as well as employers, to help in the workplace, classroom, or management of a consumer’s home.
- [MassAbility](#) also administers the Commonwealth of Massachusetts's initiative to “Maximize AT in Consumer's Hands.” It is one of 56 state-level AT Act programs in the United States. Its mission is to promote the use of AT and AT services to enhance the independence of people with disabilities, enabling equal participation in all of life's activities.
- Massachusetts established the [MassHealth Personal Care Attendant Program](#). The program helps people with permanent or chronic disabilities keep their independence, stay in the community, and manage their own personal care by providing funds to hire personal care attendants (PCAs). The PCA consumer (the person receiving PCA services) is the employer of the PCA and is fully responsible for recruiting, hiring, scheduling, training and, if necessary, firing PCAs.

## **Provide Skills Training**

- MOD provides [training and technical assistance](#) to executive branch ADA Coordinators and personnel to help them comply with the ADA and other disability rights laws. MOD also helps administer Reasonable Accommodation Capital Reserve Account (RACRA) funds to agencies that need financial assistance to meet employee reasonable accommodation requests. For example:
- The Client Assistance Program (CAP), a part of MOD’s Disability Rights Unit (DRU), provides support and advocacy for people who are interested in or are currently accessing VR and IL services. In 2021, CAP launched an interactive Disability Disclosure in Employment Workshop Series, which consists of three separate workshops over Zoom. The series helps employees and jobseekers with disabilities and their advocates navigate disclosing a disability at different

stages of the employment process, best practices for requesting a reasonable accommodation, and recognizing and addressing disability discrimination in the workplace. More than 300 people have been trained through this series.

- The [Work Experience Program \(WEP\)](#) took place in 2023 and was a collaborative effort between MOD and the Human Resources Division (HRD) to help close the disability employment gap by connecting talented candidates with disabilities to state agencies. Each host agency is matched with one or more participants. Optional webinars offered to host agencies during the WEP include topics such as: disability etiquette training, panel discussions with current Commonwealth employees with disabilities, ADA compliance for state agencies, how to respond to reasonable accommodation requests from employees, and digital accessibility 101.

### **Policy Pulse Check: State as a Model Employer (SAME) of People with Disabilities**

State policymakers may want to review implementation of **current practices**, including those described above, to identify opportunities to expand and enhance existing policies and programs, including:

- ✓ Develop a strategy to increase state employment opportunities for people with disabilities, drive coordination among stakeholders, and communicate the state's commitment to disability employment opportunities (e.g., issue an Executive Order or enact legislation with a clear plan of action).
- ✓ Implement recruitment and hiring initiatives (e.g., hiring authorities, appointment lists, trial work periods, apprenticeships, and paid internship opportunities) to facilitate employment of discouraged workers, such as workers with disabilities.
- ✓ Ensure workplace accessibility and universal design in virtual and physical government spaces (e.g., facilities, job applications, websites, mobile apps, online systems, and other governmental environments).
- ✓ Provide skills training for new and incumbent employees to incorporate work-based learning and on-the-job training into state government talent development strategies.

Policy options adopted by other states related to SAME that Massachusetts **may want to explore**, include:

- ✓ Establish a governance and accountability structure to coordinate SAME implementation, track progress toward identified objectives, spearhead interagency alignment efforts, and take responsibility for continuous improvement of partnerships and programs.
- ✓ Model SAME best practices for the private sector, including improved reasonable accommodation offerings, disability awareness and etiquette training, and sharing of best practices around employment of disabled people.

---

## **Career Readiness and Economic Mobility**

---

While the job market is always evolving, one constant remains: Individuals must develop marketable skills to obtain jobs and remain employed. This is particularly important for people with disabilities who may experience challenges finding and maintaining work or advancing in their careers. State and local governments can facilitate career readiness and WBL opportunities for individuals with disabilities (including youth and young adults) that

align with education and career development plans and meet state and local workforce needs. Policy considerations include:

- ✓ **Promote career readiness, development, and planning**, including opportunities for career exploration, job shadowing, and workplace tours; informational interviews; mentorship; career and technical education; and higher education.
- ✓ **Strengthen and expand the infrastructure for WBL experiences**, including service learning, internships, pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships, and other training programs.
- ✓ **Provide job seekers with career supports and services**, including benefits counseling (e.g., Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts) and tools for parents that can help individuals with disabilities access and sustain meaningful employment and financial independence.
- ✓ **Promote innovation and universal design in career pathways programming.**

### ***Massachusetts Policies and Practices Related to Career Readiness and Economic Supports***

#### **Promote Career Readiness Development and Planning**

- In 2024, Governor Healy issued [Executive Order No. 627](#) instituting skills-based hiring practices for the state's workforce. Through this Executive Order, for the vast majority of job postings, the administration will focus primarily on applicants' skills, knowledge and abilities rather than educational credentials. Job postings will only be allowed to include degree conditions when absolutely necessary to the performance of the job. Additionally, for the first time, hiring managers will receive training and tools to implement this new hiring strategy effectively. While this order is not specific to individuals with disabilities, it can benefit individuals with disabilities who may use alternative pathways to obtain skills.
- MRC offers [Pre-Employment Transition Services](#) (Pre-ETS) for students with disabilities aged 14-21. Pre-ETS providers focus on five core services to offer students during the program: job exploration and counseling; workplace readiness training; work-based learning experiences; counseling on post-secondary education or training; and self-advocacy and peer mentoring.
- [SB 2412](#) (2019) implements a Twenty-first Century Education Trust Fund for the purpose of improving educational opportunities for all students, sharing best practices for improving classroom learning.
- [Services for Transition Age Youth and Young Adults](#) (TAYA) bridge the Child, Youth and Family & Adult Mental Health Services Divisions. The Department strives to match youth and young adults with the services and supports that best meet their clinical and developmental needs. Additionally, DMH offers specific services and supports that are designed to meet the unique needs of youth and young adults ages 16-22. The goal is for TAYA to embark on a positive life path into adulthood - toward the goals of personal stability, community housing, employment, education and positive family/social relationships.
- The [Pathways to Work](#) program, administered by the Department of Transitional Assistance, provides employment and training supports to TANF and SNAP recipients to

promote meaningful career pathways that advance economic mobility. Each year, the Legislature allocates funding for employment services for families receiving TAFDC through the Employment Services Program (ESP) line item. They also provide a [Competitive Integrated Employment Services Program](#).

- MRC's [NextGen Careers](#) (program at capacity as of May 2025) is an initiative to help young adults explore the world of work. NextGeners learn to advocate for themselves, gain confidence and fast track their job journey. The target population is VR-eligible young adults with a disability age 18-30. Recruitment efforts focus on young adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (ID/DD), Autism spectrum disorders, Sensory (Blind, Low Vision, Deaf, Hard of Hearing).

### **Strengthen and Expand the Infrastructure for Work-Based Learning Experiences**

- In 2024, the Healey-Driscoll Administration announced [The Employment Program for Young Adults with Disabilities](#). The program, funded through the FY 2024 budget and administered by Commonwealth Corporation, will provide \$900,000 in grants to fund nine organizations which provide job training, employment placement and post-placement support for 275 young adults with disabilities.
- MRC offers supports around [job preparation and exploration](#) for students 14 and older while they are still in high school. MRC works with many community providers to offer pre-employment transition services for students. The goal of these services and supports is to provide youth with the skills needed to be successful with employment or further education after high school.
- Massachusetts's Connecting Activities (CA) is a Department of Elementary and Secondary Education initiative that leverages a statewide infrastructure to support "college and career readiness" for all students. The CA line item in the state budget establishes public-private partnerships through the 16 local workforce investment boards to connect schools and businesses by providing structured work-based learning experiences for students that support both their academic and employability skill attainment. CA enables staff to recruit employers, prepare and place students in brokered work-based learning opportunities, and structure those experiences through the use of the [Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan](#).
- A key strategy of the [Massachusetts' Workforce Agenda](#) is to align Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission job training funds and Massachusetts Commission for the Blind clients with existing sector strategies managed by Commonwealth Corporation for the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund. This collaborative approach will create a strong pipeline of talent among individuals with disabilities.

### **Provide Job Seekers with Career Supports and Services**

- [SB 2412](#) (2019) requires each school district to establish a three-year plan for addressing achievement among students, which includes a description of how the district will effectuate and measure increased engagement with parents of students with disabilities.
- The [Federation for Children with Special Needs](#) mission is to provide information, support and assistance to parents of children with disabilities. The Federation has multiple initiatives to support, educate and empower families and professionals around the education, health and community needs of children. These programs promote family

engagement in all communities throughout Massachusetts. The Parent Training and Information Center provides technical assistance; workshops; parent leadership training in English and other languages; transition mini conferences; webinars; IEP clinics; internships and mentoring; network meetings; and referrals to inform, educate and empower families, children with disabilities (birth to age 26) and the professionals that work with them to improve outcomes for students of all ages with disabilities of all types. This program is not state led but connects individuals to state level resources.

- Massachusetts enacted a [policy \(c.71B § 17\)](#) creating higher education programs for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities who do not meet eligibility criteria to attend an institution of higher education.
- The [Massachusetts Inclusive Postsecondary Education \(MAIPSE\)](#) (MAICEI) offers grants to college-school partnerships to support eligible public high school students with intellectual disabilities, ages 18-22, to increase their academic and career success by being included in a college or university community of learners.
- [Think College](#) provides resources, technical assistance and training related to college options for students with intellectual disability and manages the only national listing of college programs for students with intellectual disability in the United States. While the program is national and not state led, it is headquartered in Boston and provides valuable connections to higher education for students with disabilities and their families.
- [Partners for Youth with Disabilities \(PYD\)](#) helps youth prepare for the workforce through a multi-faceted approach centered on its Career Readiness program, which combines classroom learning with "real world" experiences and mentoring from professionals. This curriculum focuses on equipping participants with the necessary skills and confidence to thrive in a professional environment, leading to 67% of participants obtaining employment due to these gains. Additionally, PYD provides tangible opportunities such as paid internships and job shadowing, while programs like the Youth Leadership Forum and the Dinah F.B. Cohen Fellowship specifically target the development of leadership and advocacy skills for students and recent graduates. Beyond direct youth services, PYD also works to improve the overall employment landscape by training thousands of professionals in disability inclusion best practices and providing related services to various companies and organizations.
- The Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council delivers trainings on a variety of topics through [The Mass Advocates Standing Strong](#) (MASS) program. [The Self-Advocacy Leadership Series \(SALS\)](#) is an eight-class online series that focuses on the fundamentals of leadership for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. MASS partners with agencies across the state including the Department of Developmental Services, Disabled Persons Protection Commission, Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council, and the Building Partnerships for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities Initiative.
- The [Transition to Adulthood Program](#) serves students with disabilities who attend public, private or residential schools throughout Massachusetts. Students learn skills and self-confidence to better prepare them for independence in adulthood. Working with adult peer role models, as well as skills training, helps students learn how to take on the responsibilities of living independently in the community.

- The [Youth Leadership Network](#) (YLN) is a state-wide program promoting self-advocacy and self-awareness for youth and young adults with disabilities ages 14-26.
- [HB 4047](#) (2014) established an Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Account to enable individuals with disabilities to save private funds for the purpose of education, employment, transportation, assistive technology and other qualified expenses. The Massachusetts ABLE Program is called [The Attainable Savings Plan](#), and it is open to residents of other states as well as Massachusetts residents. ABLE accounts are bank accounts that allow individuals with disabilities to save money without jeopardizing their disability benefits. ABLE accounts come from the *federal* ABLE (Achieving a Better Life Experience) Act, but they are established and managed on a *state* level.

### **Promote Innovation and Universal Design in Career Pathways and Programming**

- [Massachusetts Innovation Career Pathways](#) are designed to provide students with coursework and work-based learning in in-demand sectors including Advanced Manufacturing, Business/Finance, Clean Energy, Environmental/Life Sciences, Health care, and IT – with 269 pathways designated in 119 schools statewide. A core guiding principle is that designated pathway programs must prioritize students underrepresented in higher education and in high-skill industries.

### **Policy Pulse Check: Career Readiness and Economic Supports**

State policymakers may want to review implementation of current practices, including those described above, to identify opportunities to expand and enhance existing policies and programs, including:

- ✓ Promote career readiness, development, and planning, including opportunities for career exploration, job shadowing, and workplace tours; informational interviews; mentorship; career and technical education; and higher education.
- ✓ Strengthen and expand the infrastructure for WBL experiences, including service learning, internships, pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships, and other training programs.
- ✓ Provide job seekers with career supports and services, including benefits counseling (e.g., Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts) and tools for parents that can help individuals with disabilities access and sustain meaningful employment and financial independence.

Policy options adopted by other states related to career readiness and economic supports that Massachusetts may want to explore include:

- ✓ Promote innovation and universal design in career pathways programming.

---

### **Behavioral Health at Work**

---

Behavioral health refers to the topics of mental distress, mental health conditions, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, and substance use. An estimated 61.5 million Americans live with a behavioral health condition. Fostering a behavioral health-friendly and recovery-ready

workplace<sup>1</sup> is crucial for overall productivity, employee well-being, and organizational success. Further, as the number of people with mental health conditions and substance use disorder increases, so does the need to recruit and hire skilled professionals to deliver behavioral health services. More than 122 million Americans live in areas with a shortage of behavioral health workers. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity to steer more job seekers into the behavioral health workforce, including people with disabilities. State and local governments can enact employment policies that extend to individuals with mental health and substance use conditions and encourage employment of people with disabilities to address the behavioral health workforce shortage. Policy considerations include:

- ✓ **Strengthen workers' health insurance coverage** for mental health conditions and substance use disorder.
- ✓ **Strengthen access to workplace care and supports** for individuals with mental health conditions or substance use disorder, including employee assistance programs (EAPs), stay-at-work/return-to-work initiatives, and access to counseling and other support services.
- ✓ **Expand the behavioral health workforce** to include people with disabilities by engaging in interstate licensure reciprocity, modifying behavioral health professional requirements, incentivizing training for mental health professionals, and establishing student loan repayment programs.
- ✓ **Address behavioral health disparities for rural workers** by expanding access to care through broadband deployment, increased access through telehealth, and services tailored to community needs.

## ***Massachusetts Policies and Practices Related to Behavioral Health at Work***

### **Strengthen Workers' Health Insurance Coverage**

- The [Massachusetts Mental Health Parity Act](#) (Act 256, 2008) requires insurance companies to cover specified diagnoses on a "nondiscriminatory basis," meaning copayments, deductibles, coinsurance, unit-of-service limits, and annual or lifetime maximums cannot be greater for mental disorders than for physical conditions.
- [SB 3097](#) (2022) addresses a broad range of behavioral health issues including emergency department boarding, low reimbursement rates for behavioral health providers, lack of insurance coverage for certain behavioral health services, and the demand for school-based behavioral health services.

### **Strengthen Access to Workplace Care and Supports**

- The [Massachusetts Behavioral Health Help Line \(BHHL\) Resource Directory](#) helps individuals find mental health, substance use treatment support services, and health-related social connections across Massachusetts.
- The [Department of Mental Health Adult Services](#) focus on community-based supports which enable individuals receiving treatment to recover and thrive in their communities. Services include case management, Adult Community Clinical Services, Programs of

---

<sup>1</sup> Recovery-Ready Workplace: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/RRW-hub/Recovery-ready-workplace>

Assertive Community Treatment (PACT), Respite, Clubhouses, Recovery Learning Communities (RLCs), crisis stabilization units, and homelessness services. The department also runs Recovery Learning Communities (RLCs). RLCs are peer-run networks of self-help/peer support, information and referral, advocacy and training activities. Training in trauma-healing, recovery concepts and tools, advocacy forums and social and recreational events are all part of what goes on in a Recovery Learning Community.

### **Expand the Behavioral Health Workforce**

- The [HPC Behavioral Health Workforce Center \(BHWC\)](#) was established in partnership with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to strengthen the state's capacity to identify and respond to current and ongoing behavioral health workforce needs. BHWC has identified four key pillars to organize and frame the Center's initial policy recommendations and research portfolio.
- The [Support for Behavioral Health Field Placements Program](#) provides individuals enrolled part-time or full-time in certain behavioral health undergraduate or graduate programs at eligible public or private Institutions of Higher Education in Massachusetts funds to support the completion of unpaid field placements, internships, apprenticeships and practicums necessary for completing educational requirements.
- The [Behavioral Health Workforce Scholarship Program](#) provides individuals enrolled part-time or full-time in certain behavioral health graduate programs at eligible public or private Institutions of Higher Education in Massachusetts with scholarship funds to support credential attainment. Scholarship recipients make a commitment to working in the Massachusetts behavioral health field upon graduation.
- The [Behavioral Health Supervising Clinicians Incentive Program \(SCIP\)](#) is a two-year program designed to incentivize community-based organizations to provide clinical supervision to individuals in Massachusetts pursuing specific licensures and/or certifications in the behavioral health field, including mental health and substance use treatment.
- Introduced in 2021 and implemented in 2023, the [Behavioral Health Roadmap](#) is a multi-year blueprint, based on listening sessions and feedback from nearly 700 individuals, families, providers and other stakeholders who identified the need for expanded access to treatment, more effective treatment, and improved health equity. The roadmap introduces reforms to make outpatient assessment and treatment more readily available through a number of changes including:
  - Expanded access to treatment, including nights and weekends for a subset of behavioral health providers.
  - More behavioral health treatment, mental health and addiction services—at primary care offices.
  - Better, more convenient community-based alternatives to the emergency department for crisis intervention services.

### **Policy Pulse Check: Behavioral Health at Work**

State policymakers may want to review implementation of **current practices**, including those described above, to identify opportunities to expand and enhance existing policies and programs, including:

- ✓ Strengthen workers' health insurance coverage for mental health conditions and substance use disorder.
- ✓ Expand the behavioral health workforce to include people with disabilities by engaging in interstate licensure reciprocity, modifying behavioral health professional requirements, incentivizing training for mental health professionals, and establishing student loan repayment programs.
- ✓ Strengthen access to workplace care and supports for individuals with mental health conditions or substance use disorder, including employee assistance programs (EAPs), stay-at-work/return-to-work initiatives, and access to counseling and other support services.

Policy options adopted by other states related to behavioral health that Massachusetts **may want to explore** include:

- ✓ Address mental health disparities for rural workers by expanding access to care through broadband deployment, increased access through telehealth, and services tailored to community needs.

---

## **Stay-at-Work and Return-to-Work**

---

Each year, millions of U.S. workers experience the onset of an illness or injury, or a change in a medical condition that challenges their ability to work. Many of these workers are at risk of leaving the labor force, especially if they do not receive timely and effective stay-at-work/return-to-work (SAW/RTW) supports. State and local governments can enact policies that support the retention of employees in the event of injury or illness (on or off the job) or a change in status of an individual's disability. Policy considerations include:

- ✓ **Establish SAW/RTW programs in the private and public sectors**, including appointing RTW coordinators, providing ill or injured individuals with VR services, and/or offering benefits counseling.
- ✓ **Provide employer incentives**, subsidies, and/or grants to establish SAW/RTW programs.
- ✓ **Facilitate connections between employers, health care providers, and insurers**, including providing access to best and promising practices.
- ✓ **Offer employee incentive, wellness, and injury prevention programs.**

### ***Massachusetts Policies and Practices Related to Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work***

#### **Establish SAW/RTW Programs in the Private and Public Sectors**

- [Chapter 152, Section 73A of the Massachusetts General Laws](#) states that any employee who by reason of partial disability is entitled to receive compensation and can be suitably employed with duties adapted to his reduced earning capacity, may be employed at a salary based on his reduced earning capacity. The head of the department in which the individual was employed may temporarily employ a person to fill any vacancy in the

original position, pending the return of such employee to full time employment at his regular duties.

- [Mass4YOU](#) is an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) available to benefits-eligible employees and their families. Individuals have access to a comprehensive suite of free, confidential support available 24/7, including in-person or tele-counseling, financial advising, convenience services and substance abuse counseling, among other services.
- The [WorkShare](#) program is an option for companies covered by the unemployment insurance system to manage employee hours in partnership with the unemployment insurance benefit system. WorkShare allows employers to bring back furloughed employees and hire new employees on a reduced basis to incentivize a return to work. New hires or furloughed workers receive unemployment insurance benefits to supplement their part-time wages.
- The [Massachusetts Employer Wellness Program Credit](#) (EWPC) was available to certain employers that were personal income and corporate excise taxpayers in Massachusetts. The goal of the EWPC was to provide businesses with 200 or fewer employees with a greater opportunity to implement wellness programs. The credit was equal to 25% of the costs incurred by employers (both personal income and corporate excise taxpayers) that were associated with implementing a “certified wellness program.” While the EWPC has expired, certain unused (i.e., carried over) EWPC previously granted to personal income or corporate excise taxpayers are still available to be claimed against corporate excise or personal income tax incurred during tax years.
- Massachusetts employees are eligible for up to 26 weeks of paid combined family and medical leave (PFML) per benefit year (12 weeks to care for a family member, up to 20 weeks for an employee's own illness, and up to 26 weeks to care for a military member with a serious health condition). Massachusetts’s PFML law is funded through employer and employee contributions, and is different from the federal FMLA, and from any benefits an employer might already offer. The PFML law covers most Massachusetts employees who have [met the minimum earnings requirement established annually by the Department of Unemployment Assistance \(DUA\)](#) during the last four completed calendar quarters. If an individual is self-employed, they may opt in through [MassTaxConnect](#).
- The [Department of Family and Medical Leave](#) updated contribution and benefit rates for 2025 and issued new employer guidance reflecting recent IRS clarification that state-paid medical leave benefits are treated as third-party sick pay for FICA purposes. These updates create opportunities to strengthen integration between PFML benefits, employer disability insurance, and SAW/RTW programs, particularly for workers returning after medical or disability-related absences.

### **Provide Employer Incentives**

- The [Reasonable Accommodations Capital Reserve Account](#) (RACRA) was established to assist executive branch agencies in responding to employee requests for reasonable accommodations in the workplace, where providing the accommodation may otherwise be a financial hardship for the agency. RACRA is a capital allocation established within the Executive Office for Administration and Finance (A&F) and is governed by the provisions of [Executive Order No. 592](#) (2020).

## Offer Employee Incentive, Wellness, and Injury Prevention Programs

- The [MassHealth Premium Assistance](#) program reimburses eligible MassHealth members for some or all the premium cost of eligible private insurance. The program is for MassHealth members who have access to employer-sponsored health insurance (ESI) from a job or from another source. If individuals have MassHealth and have access to ESI, they may be able to get help paying for the health insurance premium if they qualify for the Premium Assistance program. MassHealth may also assist individuals with other out-of-pocket costs such as copayments, deductibles and coinsurance.
- Massachusetts has an innovative [Qualified Loss Management Program](#) that is available to firms with high injury and illness rates that are in the state's "Assigned Risk" pool because they are not able to obtain workers' compensation insurance in the voluntary market. Eligible firms that apply for this program receive a workers' compensation premium credit, for a period of up to four years, if they subscribe to a qualified loss management firm and remain in such firm's Loss Management Program during that period.
- Massachusetts firms participating in the workers' compensation program receive a premium credit for enrolling in a [Qualified Loss Management Program](#). The purpose of this innovative program is to apply a prospective credit, for a period of up to four years, to the premium of assigned risk insureds who subscribe to a qualified loss management firm and remain in such firm's Loss Management Program during that period.
- [Benefits Counseling](#) is also part of MassAbility and it provides support to help people with severe disabilities choose, get and maintain a career. Individuals who get Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and are employed or looking for a job can utilize benefits counseling to help understand what may happen when they go to work or increase earnings.

### **Policy Pulse Check: Stay-at-Work and Return-to-Work**

State policymakers may want to review implementation of **current practices**, including those described above, to identify opportunities to expand and enhance existing policies and programs, including:

- ✓ Establish SAW/RTW programs in the private and public sectors, including appointing RTW coordinators, providing ill or injured individuals with VR services, and/or offering benefits counseling.
- ✓ Offer employee incentive, wellness, and injury prevention programs.

Policy options adopted by other states related to SAW/RTW that Massachusetts **may want to explore** include:

- ✓ Provide employer incentives, subsidies, and/or grants to establish SAW/RTW programs.
- ✓ Facilitate connections between employers, health care providers, and insurers, including providing access to best and promising practices.

---

## Private-Sector Engagement

---

The workforce system must educate, train, and prepare the American workforce to meet the needs of employers. Policymakers can also increase labor force participation, reduce

workforce shortages, and strengthen the local economy by supporting businesses in recruiting, hiring, retaining, and advancing talented employees, including workers with disabilities. Central to policymakers' success is cultivating strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with the private sector. State and local governments can advance policies that build the capacity of private- and nonprofit-sector employers to recruit, hire, train, and retain disabled workers. Policy considerations include:

- ✓ **Provide businesses with technical assistance and education** on the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities; strategies for recruiting, hiring, and retaining workers with disabilities; creating accessible environments; and providing reasonable accommodations.
- ✓ **Establish tax credits and incentives** to encourage businesses to hire and retain qualified applicants with disabilities, including incentives for providing employment supports (e.g., reasonable accommodations, transportation, and childcare).
- ✓ **Encourage disability- and disabled veteran-owned businesses and those that employ individuals with disabilities to participate in state procurement.**
- ✓ **Create public-private partnerships** to facilitate collaboration around disability employment, including the development of talent pipelines linking businesses with qualified disabled applicants.
- ✓ **Support entities designing and deploying emerging technologies**, such as artificial intelligence, in exploring ways technology can be leveraged to improve accessibility and maximize benefits for people with disabilities.
- ✓ **Expand accessible transportation options**, including leveraging funding, public-private partnerships, and innovative transportation models.

### ***Massachusetts Policies and Practices Related to Private-Sector Engagement***

#### **Provide Businesses with Technical Assistance and Education**

- [Massachusetts](#) surveyed participants regarding self-identification, disclosure and reasonable accommodation, the employment pipeline and agency culture. The state found that employees were not aware of the processes for self-identification or reasonable accommodation, or the difference between the two. In response, the state created a marketing campaign.
- The [MassHire](#) Department of Career Services oversees Massachusetts's network of MassHire Career Centers, which assist businesses in finding qualified workers, providing jobseekers with career guidance, and offering referrals to jobs and training. Employers can take advantage of employment and training resources, including assistance with recruitment and hiring, job matching with potential hires, tax credit programs, and labor market information. MassHire [BizWorks](#) representatives connect businesses to many money-saving services and resources offered through state workforce development, economic development and education partners to help them grow and thrive.
- The [Employment Services Program \(ESP\)](#) is a joint federal and state funded program administered by the [Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance](#) (DTA) whose primary goal is to assist clients in finding jobs, resolving barriers to employment and providing a way to self-sufficiency. Employers have access to a pool of screened and job-

ready candidates to interview and hire. Employers also have the option to work with candidates through ESP's internship program to determine if the candidate is a good fit for the position before hiring them. Candidates receive support services from DTA, which increases the rate of job retention and overall success. DTA serves one out of every eight people in the Commonwealth including working families, children, elders and people with disabilities.

- [MCB](#) provides employers with a pool of screened and job-ready candidates to interview and hire. The MCB Employment Specialist works cooperatively with the VR Counselor to prepare individuals for job employment. MCB offers an Internship Program and On-the-Job Training (OJT) collaboration, which assists companies in reducing hiring and training costs. Through an Internship Program partnership or OJT collaboration, a business has the flexibility and support to carefully evaluate candidates' abilities as they work for the business. MCB's team of Employment Service Specialists can offer businesses critical guidance on how to maximize use of internships or OJT supports.
- [Empowering to Employ](#) is a [partnership](#) between the Department of Transitional Assistance and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) that maximizes employment opportunities for workforce engagement for Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) families and clients with disabilities. This initiative was launched on July 1, 2018, with a shared commitment to establish an integrated employment model for individuals with disabilities receiving TAFDC leading to sustained employment, economic independence and family stability.

### **Encourage Disability- and Disabled Veteran-owned Businesses and those that Employ Individuals with Disabilities to Participate in State Procurement**

- Massachusetts enacted [HB 4569](#) (2016). Section 4 of the legislation establishes participation goals for individuals with disabilities in state procurement practices, including businesses that hire people with disabilities.
- Pursuant to HB 4569 (2016) and Section 88 of [Chapter 154 of the Acts of 2018](#), the Supplier Diversity Office (SDO), in collaboration with the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD), established the SDO Individuals with Disabilities Pilot Program. During the pilot operation, SDO built engagement of the disability community into state contracting and procurement through contracting opportunities and workforce development. This effort has expanded into [the Empowering Abilities in Contracting and Employment \(EACE\) Program](#). The goals of this program are to:
  - Further expand the participation of Disability-Owned Business Enterprises (DOBE) and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Business Enterprises (SDVOBE) in statewide contracting.
  - Increase the representation of people with disabilities working on state contracts by assisting contractors with the identification, recruitment, and hiring of qualified individuals with disabilities within the contractor's workforce(s).
- The program requires close collaboration and partnerships with a multitude of state agencies and nonprofit organizations who provide workforce development and employment assistance services for the disability community.

## Establish Tax Credits and Incentives

- The Massachusetts [Disability Employment Tax Credit](#) is a tax incentive program for employers to increase employment opportunities for individuals with a disability in the Commonwealth. After a minimum of 12 months of continuous employment, employers are allowed to claim a state tax credit equal to \$5,000 or 30% of the wages paid to each qualified employee with a disability in the first taxable year of employment, whichever is less. In each subsequent tax year, employers are allowed a credit equal to \$2,000 or 30% of the wages paid to each qualified employee with a disability, whichever is less. The policy is enshrined in [Chapter 63, Section 38JJ of the Massachusetts General Laws](#).
- The [Architectural Barrier Removal Tax Deduction](#) encourages businesses of any size to remove architectural and transportation barriers to the mobility of persons with disabilities and the elderly. Businesses may claim a deduction of up to \$15,000 a year for qualified expenses that normally must be capitalized. Also, businesses can add any costs over this limit to the basis of the property and depreciate these excess costs. The deduction can be used for a variety of costs to make a facility or public transportation vehicle owned or leased for use in the business more accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities. The barrier removal must meet the guidelines and requirements issued by the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board under the ADA.
- The [Registered Apprenticeship Tax Credit](#) (RATC) promotes expansion of registered apprenticeship into health care, tech and manufacturing sectors in Massachusetts. Employers in these sectors may be eligible for up to a \$4,800 credit per qualified apprentice. Businesses can qualify for up to \$100,000 in total tax credits each calendar year. This credit is not specific to people with disabilities but may help employers offset the costs of hiring and training apprentices with disabilities.

## Create Public-Private Partnerships

- [Work Without Limits](#) is a network of employers, educational institutions, employment service providers, and state and federal agencies. Work Without Limits programs and services are geared to meet the needs of businesses that actively recruit people with disabilities, individuals with disabilities who are seeking jobs, and the employment providers that serve them. Work Without Limits coordinates a [Business Network](#) that shares best practices and builds confidence and success through their commitment to the people with disabilities as employees, customers, and suppliers. Private and public-sector businesses join Work Without Limits by becoming a member of the [Work Without Limits Business Network](#).
- The [Employment Program for Young Adults with Disabilities](#) is administered by Commonwealth Corporation on behalf of the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, in support of the Healey-Driscoll Administration's efforts to improve workforce outcomes for young adults with disabilities.
- The [Jewish Vocational Service Boston Transitions to Work Program](#) prepares participants for competitive employment in high-demand sectors such as customer service, retail, and hospitality, with employer partners including CVS Health, Spaulding Rehabilitation Network, Old Colony YMCA, South Shore Hospital, VA Brockton Medical Center, and the Sodexo-managed food service departments at Boston Children's Hospital and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.

## Support Entities Designing and Deploying Emerging Technologies

- [Section 92 of the Massachusetts Enabling Partnerships for Growth Act](#) (Chapter 358 of the Acts of 2020) established a special commission to conduct a comprehensive study relative to the impact of automation, artificial intelligence, global trade, access to new forms of data and the internet of things on the workforce, businesses and economy. The goal of the commission, ultimately called the Future of Work Commission, was to ensure sustainable jobs, fair benefits and workplace safety standards for workers in all industries, including, but not limited to, access to adequate and affordable health insurance, financial security in retirement, unemployment insurance and disability insurance. One of the key findings from the [final report](#) notes that “the disability community must be fully included as future workforce supports are put in place... Employer incentives to hire the future worker, for example, should include programs that support and sustain individuals with disabilities.
- In 2024, Governor Maura Healey signed [Executive Order No. 629](#) establishing the Artificial Intelligence Strategic Task Force to study AI and Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) technology and its impact on the state, private businesses, higher education institutions and constituents. The Task Force will conduct outreach and collect input from stakeholders and experts, advise the Governor and executive branch on the state’s role in AI implementation, and find ways to encourage leading industries to adopt this technology to ensure continued success. One of the strategic objectives of the task force is to recommend new policies and develop frameworks that promote ethical and responsible AI development, including those related to bias, privacy and security, which may affect individuals with disabilities.

## Expand Accessible Transportation Options

- Governor Maura Healey issued [Executive Order No. 626](#) (2024) creating the Governor’s Transportation Funding Task Force. The task force is responsible for developing recommendations for a long-term, sustainable transportation finance plan that can support road, rail and transit systems throughout the state. One of the drivers of the task force was to create an accessible transportation system that addresses the mobility needs and concerns of residents with disabilities.
- Established in 2018, the [Commission on the Future of Transportation](#) explored anticipated changes in technology, climate, land use and the economy to determine likely impacts on transportation between 2020 and 2040.
- [HB 4570](#) (2016) prohibits a transportation network company from imposing additional charges or increasing fares when providing services to people with disabilities and requires all transportation network drivers to comply with applicable laws, rules and regulations relating to the accommodation of service animals. It further creates a Ride for Hire Task Force to make recommendations around public safety, consumer protection and economic fairness of the ride for hire industry, which includes a representative of the Disability Law Center.
- Governor Charlie Baker enacted [Executive Order No. 572](#) to promote the testing and deployment of highly automated driving technologies. The order also established an autonomous vehicle (AV) working group and created a process for MassDOT to allow the testing of ADS-equipped vehicles on public roads. While there was no focus on disability,

AV could have significant implications on access to employment for individuals with disabilities.

- Boston's Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) is currently operating [a taxi paratransit pilot study](#) in the hopes of increasing service quality to riders and cost-savings to the Boston paratransit program, known as The Ride. In 2016, [MBTA announced](#) that TNCs, including Uber and Lyft, will be included in the taxi paratransit initiative and anticipate significant cost savings to the paratransit program as a result of the new initiative.
- [The RIDE](#) paratransit service provides door-to-door, shared-ride public transportation to people who can't use the subway, bus or trolley all or some of the time due to temporary or permanent disability. The RIDE is available year-round in 58 cities and towns in the greater Boston area, with similar operating hours to the MBTA—generally from 5 AM to 1 AM daily. Customers schedule their trips on The RIDE one to five days in advance and are given a pick-up window for their ride's arrival.
- [Ride Match](#) is a one-stop searchable directory of public, private and accessible transportation options in Massachusetts. Originally, Ride Match was intended to be a comprehensive database for Southeastern Massachusetts only, but other regions asked if they could participate in the project. In 2015, MassDOT awarded them a Community Transit Grant to expand the database and four regional transit authorities agreed to participate in the pilot project. Today, all 15 regional transit authorities as well as the MBTA participate in the state-wide program, making Ride Match an essential service for area agencies, medical centers and individuals searching for accessible transportation options in Massachusetts.

### **Policy Pulse Check: Private-Sector Engagement**

State policymakers may want to review implementation of **current practices**, including those described above, to identify opportunities to expand and enhance existing policies and programs, including:

- ✓ Provide businesses with technical assistance and education on the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities; strategies for recruiting, hiring, and retaining workers with disabilities; creating accessible environments; and providing reasonable accommodations.
- ✓ Establish tax credits and incentives to encourage businesses to hire and retain qualified applicants with disabilities, including incentives for providing employment supports (e.g., reasonable accommodations, transportation, and childcare).
- ✓ Encourage disability- and disabled veteran-owned businesses and those that employ individuals with disabilities to participate in state procurement.
- ✓ Create public-private partnerships to facilitate collaboration around disability employment, including the development of talent pipelines linking businesses with qualified disabled applicants.
- ✓ Support entities designing and deploying emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, in exploring ways technology can be leveraged to improve accessibility and maximize benefits for people with disabilities.

- ✓ Expand accessible transportation options, including leveraging funding, public-private partnerships, and innovative transportation models.

---

## Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment

---

Entrepreneurship and self-employment can provide a promising pathway to employment and economic self-sufficiency. Research suggests there are numerous benefits to self-employment, including greater customization of job responsibilities and higher wages. In addition, self-employment may offer increased financial independence, opportunities to achieve career goals, and greater contributions to the state and local economy, including job creation and tax revenues. State and local governments can enact policies that encourage the development of disability-owned businesses, including disabled veteran-owned businesses. Policy considerations include:

- ✓ **Formalize entrepreneurship and self-employment as viable strategies** for individuals with disabilities, including through the establishment of training and career development programs.
- ✓ **Promote opportunities and set goals and priorities for disability-owned businesses** to contract with the state for goods and services.
- ✓ **Provide efficient and expedited certification processes** for businesses contracting with state government.
- ✓ **Offer incentives and technical assistance** to support entrepreneurs and start-up efforts.

### **Massachusetts Policies Related to Entrepreneurship & Self Employment:**

#### **Formalize Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment as Viable Strategies**

- The Massachusetts [Employment First Policy](#) includes self-employment as an option for competitive integrated employment. Self-employment is defined as earning income directly from one's own business, profession or trade; and not as an employee of a business owned by someone else.
- Massachusetts has a number of [services for entrepreneurs and small businesses](#). Most programs are not specific to individuals with disabilities. These programs include: [MassDevelopment Lending Products](#) and [MassVentures Venture Capital Investments](#), among numerous others.
- The [NextGen Career program](#) focuses on building career skills and confidence in young adults. It isn't focused on just employment but also builds NextGeners' ability to trust themselves and communicate their needs as a person with a disability.

#### **Promote Opportunities and Set Goals and Priorities for Disability-Owned Businesses**

- Under [Massachusetts' Executive Order No. 565](#) (2015), disability-owned businesses are identified as one of the new supplier diversity program (SDP) targets and included in full participation in the procurement efforts of all state agencies. State agencies are required to meet or exceed forthcoming SDP target spending benchmarks as well as participate in reporting activities established by the Office of Supplier Diversity.

- Massachusetts enacted [SB 2937](#) (2021). The legislation establishes the Supplier Diversity Office (SDO) and specifies that the SDO shall, every two years and in consultation with the MOD, establish goals for participation of individuals with disabilities in all areas of state procurement contracting. Participation goals may be met by contracting or subcontracting with businesses that are owned by persons with disabilities or that hire, or identify and recruit with the intent to hire, qualified applicants with disabilities. SDO shall provide assistance to the secretariats in determining opportunities for contracting with businesses that hire persons with disabilities to meet the participation goal set forth in this subsection, including contractors and subcontractors providing goods and services under multi-year contracts or grants funded by agencies within the executive offices.
- In 2023, the Healey-Driscoll Administration [expanded state spending benchmarks to disability-owned businesses](#). The administration set a goal of purchasing \$18 million from businesses owned by individuals with disabilities during Fiscal Year 2024.

### **Provide Efficient and Expedited Certification Processes**

- Massachusetts uses the [Disability:IN](#) certification process and requirements to certify disability-owned businesses, including service-disabled veteran owned businesses

### **Offer Incentives and Technical Assistance**

- Massachusetts offers business owners and entrepreneurs numerous tax credits to support growth and innovation. While many of [these credits](#) are not specific to individuals with disabilities, business owners with disabilities may be eligible. Employers can also receive [tax credits for hiring qualified employees with a disability](#).

### **Policy Pulse Check: Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment**

State policymakers may want to review implementation of **current practices**, including those described above, to identify opportunities to expand and enhance existing policies and programs, including:

- ✓ Formalize entrepreneurship and self-employment as viable strategies for individuals with disabilities, including through the establishment of training and career development programs.
- ✓ Promote opportunities and set goals and priorities for disability-owned businesses to contract with the state for goods and services.

Policy options adopted by other states related to entrepreneurship that Massachusetts **may want to explore** include:

- ✓ Provide efficient and expedited certification processes for businesses contracting with state government.
- ✓ Offer incentives and technical assistance to support entrepreneurs and start-up efforts.

---

### **Interagency Coordination and Collaboration**

---

States have many programs and services available to support individuals with disabilities in employment. However, these programs often operate in silos, working toward similar goals

but with limited alignment or coordination. In addition, they often rely on funding streams with varying goals, priorities, and outcome expectations. A modern workforce system must be unified, navigable, and built around the needs of its users. Solving these challenges takes interagency collaboration and coordination. In some cases, the “blending, braiding, and sequencing” of services pools dollars from different programs and funding sources, allowing flexibility in service structure and delivery. Policy considerations include:

- ✓ **Establish an interagency coordinating body** to improve coordination and collaboration among state agencies providing employment and wraparound services for individuals with disabilities. Include representatives from various sectors, including education, workforce development, transportation, service providers, and community organizations, among others. Provide the council with dedicated funding, staffing, and accountability mechanisms, including reporting to state leadership.
- ✓ **Improve data collection and reporting mechanisms** to gather program performance data (e.g., compliance rates, incentive utilization rates, procurement contract amounts) and support policy decision-making.
- ✓ **Integrate systems to enhance collaboration** among agencies providing employment, training, and other supports to individuals with disabilities, including establishing interagency agreements.
- ✓ **Use blending, braiding, and sequencing of funds** within and among agencies to maximize the efficient and effective use of program funds intended to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

### ***Massachusetts Policies Related to Inter-Agency Coordination and Collaboration***

#### **Establish an Interagency Coordinating Body**

- Established in Chapter 3 Section 74 of the Massachusetts General Laws by the 2020 law enforcement reform legislation, the [Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities](#) is a 23-member, independent state agency with a broad charge to advance the cause of all persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth. The scope of the Commission’s work includes examining ways to improve employment and transportation, assessing data and disparities, encourage engagement of persons with disabilities as employees and vendors within the private and public sector workforce, assessing programs and practices in all state agencies as they affect persons with disabilities, advising the legislative and executive branches, and promoting and facilitating collaboration among local disability commissions, disability rights advocacy organizations and disability employment service providers.

#### **Improve Data Collection and Reporting Mechanisms**

- The People with Disabilities [Dashboard](#) offers a comprehensive view of employment-related insights, encompassing disability type, geographic variations, remote work opportunities, unemployment rates, labor force participation, and more. This dashboard is part of the Department of Economic Research's workforce dashboard project, which aggregates Massachusetts-centric employment statistics across demographic identifiers. In addition to offering a snapshot of workforce outcomes among various groups and illuminating persistent workforce disparities, these data sets underscore the substantial contributions and talents as well as needs of Massachusetts's communities.

## **Integrate Systems to Enhance Collaboration**

- The MassHire Department of Career Services, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), and the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind as well as a variety of disability service agencies work together to enhance and build employment related services for individuals with disabilities. MassHire, through its network of career centers, is committed to ensuring all individuals regardless of disabilities have access to integrated programs and services.
- MRC Vocational Rehabilitation and its Core Workforce partners developed a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) (pg. 139 of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Massachusetts Combined State Plan) with each of the 16 Workforce Development Boards (WDB) in the Commonwealth. The MOUs outline the activities that will be aligned across the partnership. These activities include but are not limited to pre-employment vocational services, post-secondary education services, Adult Basic Education (ABE), MassHire Career Center services, cross-training of staff, consultation on accessibility issues, sharing employer and labor market needs, and information job seeker training opportunities in specific geographic areas across the state, among others.
- [MRC](#) has staff members assigned to each workforce development board and career centers across the Commonwealth and plays key roles in the WIOA planning committees including the Common Measures Committee, Policy, and Youth Workgroup, ensuring the needs of individuals with disabilities are blended and braided into all workforce system activities.

## **Use Blending, Braiding, and Sequencing of Funds**

- [Commonwealth Corporation](#) awarded \$900,000 to expand JVS Boston's *Transitions to Work* program, connecting young adults across the spectrum of disabilities to meaningful employment opportunities with real career pathways.

## **Policy Pulse Check: Interagency Coordination and Collaboration**

State policymakers may want to review implementation of **current practices**, including those described above, to identify opportunities to expand and enhance existing policies and programs, including:

- ✓ Establish an interagency coordinating council to improve coordination and collaboration among state agencies providing employment and wraparound services for individuals with disabilities. Include representatives from various sectors, including education, workforce development, service providers, and community organizations among others. Consider providing the council with mechanisms for dedicated funding, staffing, and accountability.
- ✓ Improve data collection and reporting mechanisms to gather program performance data (e.g., compliance rates, incentive utilization rates, procurement contract amounts) and support policy decision-making.
- ✓ Integrate systems to enhance cooperation and collaboration among agencies providing employment, training, and other supports to individuals with disabilities, including establishing interagency agreements.

Policy options adopted by other states related to interagency coordination that Massachusetts **may want to explore** include:

- ✓ Use blending, braiding, and sequencing of funds within and among agencies to maximize the efficient and effective use of program funds intended to improve employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

## Appendix

---

This appendix includes descriptions of and links to selected policies adopted across the states. Topics include:

- ✓ [Setting the Groundwork](#)
- ✓ [Career Readiness and Economic Mobility](#)
- ✓ [Behavioral Health at Work](#)
- ✓ [Stay-at-Work and Return-to-Work](#)
- ✓ [Private-Sector Engagement](#)
- ✓ [Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment](#)
- ✓ [Interagency Coordination and Collaboration](#)
- ✓ [State as a Model Employer of People with Disabilities](#)

### ***Setting the Groundwork***

- ✓ **Establish a dedicated disability employment office or senior coordinator position** responsible for developing and implementing statewide strategies to improve the recruitment, hiring, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities.
- ✓ **Provide employees with disability awareness and etiquette training** and encourage private-sector employers to adopt similar training programs to foster welcoming workplaces.
- ✓ **Develop statewide public awareness campaigns** that highlight the contributions of people with disabilities.
- ✓ **Require state agencies to adopt appropriate language** in all statutes, regulations, and public communications, replacing outdated or insensitive terminology.
- ✓ **Embed disability engagement into broader workforce efforts.**

### **Establish a Dedicated Disability Employment Office or Senior Coordinator Position**

- In **Maryland**, there is a [cabinet-level position](#) tasked with designing, implementing, and evaluating policy relating to people with disabilities. The Secretary of Disabilities, as head of the Maryland Department of Disabilities, sits on numerous advisory councils and task forces related to disability issues. The department also provides information and referrals to Maryland citizens with disabilities, evaluates relevant state programs, and at least quarterly consults with and advises the [Maryland Commission on Disability](#).
- In **Ohio**, the legislature has established the [Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Agency](#). The [agency](#) is the designated state unit authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act (VR agency) and is responsible for other programs serving people with disabilities. The agency also consults with and advises other state agencies and coordinates programs for eligible individuals with disabilities.

## Provide Employees with Disability Awareness and Etiquette Training

- In **Illinois**, the state's [Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities \(ICED\)](#) conducts training and educational programs for state employees with disabilities and state agency personnel to expand knowledge about the rights of employees, responsibilities of employers and general information about people with disabilities.
- Governor Walz of **Minnesota** issued two executive orders. [Executive Order 19-15: Providing for Increased State Employment of Individuals with Disabilities](#) (2019) directed the creation of a plan for accessible training programs for agency hiring managers and supervisors, human resources personnel, Affirmative Action Officers and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinators. [Executive Order 19-14: Providing for State Agency Coordination of the Americans with Disabilities Act](#) orders the delivery of training and technical assistance to agency managers and supervisors on, among other topics, interviewing and accessing information on state disability resources.
- In **Ohio**, [Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities](#) (OOD) offers free, on-demand training ([30-minute](#) and [60-minute](#)) for employers about disability etiquette, proper language usage, and how to have respectful interactions with people with disabilities. Further, OOD's business relations specialists can customize [no-cost disability awareness educational trainings](#) for employer partners, including Registered Apprenticeship sponsors, on topics such as disability etiquette, mental health disabilities in the workplace, invisible disabilities, and communication in the workplace.
- **Oklahoma's** Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities published the [Oklahoma Disability Etiquette Handbook: ADA & Resources](#) to educate employers about ways to relate to people with disabilities in the workplace.

## Develop Statewide Public Awareness Campaigns

- In **Massachusetts**, the "Count Me In" campaign led by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts promotes the hiring of people with disabilities through employer toolkits, storytelling, and coordinated outreach during hiring initiatives and National Disability Employment Awareness Month.
- **Iowa** Vocational Rehabilitation Services has implemented "[Iowans with Disabilities in Action](#)," a campaign focused on showcasing successful employment outcomes and encouraging business engagement.

## Require State Agencies to Adopt Appropriate Language

- Over time, a number of states (including [Arizona](#), [Arkansas](#), [Delaware](#), [Indiana](#), [Louisiana](#), [New Jersey](#), [North Carolina](#), [North Dakota](#), [Oklahoma](#), [Rhode Island](#), [Tennessee](#), and [Wyoming](#)) have enacted people-first legislation to change statutory language related to outdated or insensitive terminology referring to people with disabilities. In 2021, additional states enacted "people first" language legislation, including **Nebraska** and **New York** (which replaced "mentally ill person" with "person with a mental disability").
- Some states, including [Alabama](#), [Colorado](#), [Idaho](#), [Mississippi](#), and [Texas](#), have enacted legislation outlining a legislative intent for terminology use in bill language, with the legislation sometimes authorizing a state authority to update and conform existing statutes and regulations to the terminology guidance found in the bill.

## Embed Disability Engagement into Broader Workforce Efforts

- The **Kentucky [Work Matters Task Force](#)** was a 23-member, cross-agency and cross-sector body designed to address barriers to employment and expand workforce participation among underutilized populations, including people with disabilities.
- **Montana's** 406 JOBS Initiative, established through [Executive Order 5-2025](#), statewide workforce coordination framework designed to improve labor force participation and reduce barriers to employment. The initiative designates the State Workforce Innovation Board as the lead coordinating body and requires interagency alignment across workforce, education, health, and human services systems. It establishes a structure for regular collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and reporting to the Governor, with a focus on connecting Montanans, including individuals with disabilities and others facing employment barriers, to job opportunities.
- [Talent Ready Utah](#) optimizes efforts made by education and industry partnerships, working collectively to build a highly skilled workforce while providing students with increased career and education opportunities.

## ***State as a Model Employer of People with Disabilities***

---

State governments can lead by example—and strengthen their own workforce—by becoming model public-sector employers of people with disabilities. State governments are usually among the largest employers in their regions, so they have a significant role to play in demonstrating and promoting best practices in the recruitment, hiring, and retention of people with disabilities through their own employment policies. State and local governments can adopt policies that help facilitate increasing the number of employees with disabilities in government agencies. States can:

- ✓ **Develop a strategy** to increase state employment opportunities for people with disabilities, drive coordination among stakeholders, and communicate the state's commitment to disability employment opportunities (e.g., enact policies with a clear plan of action).
- ✓ **Establish a governance and accountability structure** to coordinate SAME implementation, track progress toward identified objectives, spearhead interagency alignment efforts, and take responsibility for continuous improvement of partnerships and programs.
- ✓ **Implement recruitment and hiring initiatives** (e.g., hiring authorities, appointment lists, trial work periods, apprenticeships, and paid internship opportunities) to facilitate employment of discouraged workers, such as workers with disabilities.
- ✓ **Ensure workplace accessibility and universal design** in virtual and physical government spaces (e.g., facilities, job applications, online systems, and other governmental environments).
- ✓ **Provide skills training** for new and incumbent employees to incorporate work-based learning and on-the-job training into state government talent development strategies.
- ✓ **Model SAME best practices** for the private sector, including improved reasonable accommodation offerings, disability awareness and etiquette training, and sharing of best practices around the employment of disabled people.

## Develop a Strategy

States have established SAME initiatives through Executive Orders and legislation. Examples of states that have adopted SAME initiatives via Executive Orders include [Alaska](#) (2021), [California](#) (2005), [Colorado](#) (2022), [Delaware](#) (2009), [Kentucky](#) (2018), [Kansas](#) (2010), [Louisiana](#) (2019), [Massachusetts](#) (2020), Michigan (2015), Minnesota [Executive Order No. 14-14](#) and [Executive Order No. 14-15](#) (2019), [Missouri](#) (2019), [New York](#) (2023), [Ohio](#) (2019), [Vermont](#) (2002), [Virginia](#) (2020) and [Washington](#) (2013).

States that have enacted legislation include [Arizona](#) (2015), [California](#) (2001), [Colorado](#) (2022), [Connecticut](#) (2019), [Delaware](#) (statute), [Illinois](#) (2017), [Louisiana](#) (2021), [Maine](#) (2006), [Michigan](#) (2020), [Missouri](#) (2023), [Minnesota](#) (2019), [Montana](#) (2021), [Nevada](#) (2023), [New Jersey](#) (2022), [New York](#) (2022), [Oklahoma](#) (2015), [Rhode Island](#) (2022) and [Washington](#) (2015). In Virginia, the Governor issued an [Executive Order](#) and the legislature adopted [HB 1098](#) (2020).

State policymakers may also want to consider adopting comprehensive, government-wide strategic plans to guide SAME efforts. Such plans should include goals and reporting to leadership on a regular basis.

- **California** [Government Code 12803.6](#) requires the Labor and Workforce Development and Health and Human Services agencies to coordinate in developing a comprehensive strategy to meet the employment needs of individuals with disabilities, including ensuring that California is a model employer. [Section 12803.65 of the California Government Code](#) requires the Governor's Committee on Employing People with Disabilities to serve in a consulting and advisory role in the development of this comprehensive strategy on disability employment.
- **Florida** enacted [HB 7003](#) (2016), which requires each executive agency to develop a plan regarding the employment of individuals who have a disability by a specified date.
- **Illinois** requires that state agencies' [hiring plans](#) must include a numerical hiring goal for the employment of qualified persons with disabilities in the agency.
- Governor Edwards of **Louisiana** issued [Executive Order No. JBE 18-08: State as a Model Employer](#) (2018). The Executive Order establishes a five-year plan with annual goals.
- **Louisiana** enacted [HB 143](#) (2022), which provides for the development and implementation by state agencies of policies, training and reporting relative to compliance with the requirements of the ADA.
- Governor Walz of **Minnesota** issued Executive Order No. [19-15: Providing for Increased State Employment of Individuals with Disabilities](#) (2019) that orders best efforts to achieve a goal of 10 percent of employment of people with disabilities in the executive branch.
- Governor Parsons of **Missouri** issued [Executive Order No. 19-16](#) (2019) directing the state to make best efforts to eliminate the disparity in the percentage of individuals with disabilities of working age in the population and the percentage of employees with disabilities in the state workforce and set annual goals for continuing to increase the percentage of individuals with disabilities in the state workforce.
- **New Jersey** enacted [AB 5631](#) (2020), which requires that the director of the division shall ensure that employment goals of each state agency for persons with disabilities shall be reasonably related to their population in the relevant surrounding labor market areas.

- **New Jersey** enacted [A 5296](#) (2022), which specifies the development of a State as a Model Employer of People with Disabilities program, which shall be implemented by each state agency. The purpose of the SAME program is to: increase awareness of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities; provide appropriate avenues and remove barriers to the application and hiring process; and create mechanisms to increase advancement and retention rates for persons with disabilities employed in the state workforce. Each state agency shall provide sufficient and qualified staff and sufficient resources and funding for the SAME program, including, as appropriate, the appointment of a disability program manager, selective placement program coordinator and stay-at-work and return-to-work coordinator.
- Governor DeWine of **Ohio** issued [Executive Order No. 2019-03D Establishing Ohio as a Disability Inclusion State and Model Employer of Individuals with Disabilities](#) (2019), directing all state agencies to collect and evaluate self-disclosed data and use the data to develop strategic plans.
- **Virginia** enacted [HB 1098](#) (2020), which requires state agencies to prepare a plan to increase employment opportunities at the agencies for individuals with disabilities. The Secretary shall establish guidelines regarding the development and content of state agency plans and establish a reporting system for tracking and reporting the progress of state agencies toward meeting the employment hiring goals of the Commonwealth established by the legislation.

### **Establish a Governance and Accountability Structure**

- **Alaska** Governor Parnell issued an Executive Order creating a [State as Model Employer Task Force](#) (2021) within the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education. The Task Force was charged with reviewing best practices and developing strategies. The Task Force consisted of members from various state agencies, including members from the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, the State Division of Personnel and Labor Relations, the State ADA Coordinator's office and the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.
- In **California**, [AB 925](#) (2001) requires the state Health and Human Services Agency and the Labor and Workforce Development Agency to use existing resources to create a sustainable, comprehensive strategy to accomplish various goals aimed at bringing persons with disabilities into employment. The bill requires the "California Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities" be established in the Labor and Workforce Development Agency, and requires the committee to make grants to counties and local workforce investment boards in order to develop local strategies for enhancing employment opportunities for people with disabilities and to fund comprehensive local and regional benefits planning and outreach programs to assist persons with disabilities in removing barriers to work.
- **Connecticut** enacted [HB 7093](#) (2019) to establish a Task Force to increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.
- The **Illinois** General Assembly enacted [HB 2782](#) (2017), which created the [Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities Task Force](#) and authorized the Task Force to administer the state Employment First initiatives and analyzing programs

and policies of the state to determine what changes may be necessary to remove barriers to competitive employment and economic opportunity for persons with disabilities.

- **Kentucky** Governor Bevin established the [Kentucky Work Matters Task Force](#) (2018). The 23-member task force brought together key state departments and private-sector representatives, including those from family services, public safety, workforce development, and advocacy groups, to address barriers to employment and promote workforce participation among targeted constituencies. The task force developed policies to reduce barriers for people with disabilities, people with substance abuse disorders, and disabled veterans.
- Governor Edwards of **Louisiana** issued [Executive Order No. JBE 18-08: State as a Model Employer](#) (2018). The Executive Order establishes the State as a Model Employer Task Force.
- In **Maryland**, there is a [cabinet-level position](#) tasked with designing, implementing and evaluating policy relating to people with disabilities. The secretary of disabilities, as head of the Maryland Department of Disabilities, sits on numerous advisory councils and task forces related to disability issues. The department also provides information and referrals to Maryland citizens with disabilities, evaluates relevant state programs and at least quarterly consults with and advises the [Maryland Commission on Disability](#).
- **Nevada** enacted [SB 222](#) (2021), the goals of the task force included developing policies, strategies and programs to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. **Nevada** also enacted [AB 96](#) (2021), creating the Emergency Response Employees Mental Health Commission; and prescribing the duties of the Commission relating to emergency response employees who are experiencing mental health issues as a result of the nature of their work.
- **New Jersey** updated 2020 legislation by approving [A 1597/S 1937](#) (2021), establishing a five-year plan with annual goals for employment of people with disabilities; and providing guidance and technical assistance to institutions of higher education regarding the recruitment, retention and accommodations of people with disabilities.
- In **Ohio**, the legislature has established the [Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Agency](#). The [agency](#) is the designated state unit authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act (VR agency) and is responsible for programs serving people with disabilities. The agency also consults with and advises other state agencies and coordinates programs for eligible individuals with disabilities.
- In **Pennsylvania**, the [Governor's Cabinet and Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities](#) responsibilities include making suggestions to the governor on policies, procedures, regulations and legislation that help people with disabilities in Pennsylvania.
- Governor Northam of **Virginia** issued [Executive Order No. 47: Expanding Opportunities for Virginians with Disabilities](#) (2020) that provides leadership and coordinates across departments and agencies to increase employment of individuals with disabilities within state government. In addition, **Virginia** [HB 1098](#) (2020) requires the designation of senior-level staff within each state agency to be responsible for increasing the employment of individuals with disabilities within the state agency.

## Implement Recruitment and Hiring Initiatives

- The [Alaska Provisional Hire Program](#) allows hiring managers to offer provisional appointment without competitive assessment to applicants with severe disabilities for up to four months with the possibility of transitioning the provisional employee to permanent employment.
- In **Arizona**, under [Ariz. Rev. Stat. §38-492](#), individuals with disabilities are given a five-point preference on examinations, provided the individual would receive a passing grade without preference. Individuals with disabilities who are also veterans receive a 10-point preference.
- **Delaware** established a [Selective Placement Program](#) through [legislation and state policy](#). The program provides hiring managers with direct access to place qualified candidates with disabilities into vacant positions, bypassing some of the complicated and time-consuming processes.
- **Florida** enacted [HB 7003](#) (2016), which implements programs that incorporate internships, mentoring, on-the-job training, unpaid work experience, situational assessments and other innovative strategies that are specifically geared toward individuals with disabilities.
- In 2019, **Illinois** enacted [SB 726](#) (2019), which establishes a trainee program for persons with a disability and authorizes state agencies to offer at least one position per year to be filled by a person with a disability through an established trainee program, sets forth program requirements.
- **Iowa** has established a [non-competitive hiring program for disabled veterans](#).
- **Kansas** Governor Brownback issued [Executive Order No. 15-02](#) (2015), establishing a hiring preference for individuals with physical, cognitive and/or mental disabilities and requiring that all state executive branch agencies institute a system for giving hiring preference to individuals with disabilities.
- **Maryland's Special Options Eligible List fast track program** provides individuals with disabilities the opportunity to engage in training programs with the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) or an internship under [Maryland's QUEST program](#), administered jointly through the Department of Budget and Management and DORS. Also, in 2017, **Maryland** enacted [HB 1466](#), which authorizes the selection of specified disabled veterans for specified positions in the State Personnel Management System using a specified selection process and requires an appointing authority for a specified position in a unit in the executive branch of state government with an independent personnel system to develop a specified selection process for disabled veterans.
- **Montana**, under [ARM 2.21.14](#), requires that individuals with disabilities be hired over individuals without disabilities when the two are substantially equal in qualifications for an eligible initial hiring position.
- **Nevada** enacted [AB 192](#), which revised provisions governing the temporary limited appointment of persons with disabilities by state agencies. This provision of existing law is commonly referred to as the "700-hour program." In 2019, **Nevada** enacted [SB 50](#), which further revises the 700-hour program.

- **New Jersey** enacted [A 5294](#) (2022), which provides fast track hiring and employment advancement opportunities by the state for persons with significant disabilities.
- **Utah** established the [Alternative State Application Process \(ASAP\) for individuals with disabilities](#) in 2010 through [HB 17](#), under which qualified candidates with disabilities may be appointed to fill vacant positions for a six-month trial examination period. Upon completion of the examination period, the worker would then be in the position during the state's customary probation period.
- **Virginia** enacted [HB 710](#) (2022), which requires any locality to take into consideration or give preference to an individual's status as a person with a disability in its employment hiring policies and practices, provided that such person with a disability meets all of the knowledge, skills and eligibility requirements for the available position.
- **Wisconsin** enacted [AB 441](#) (2016), which establishes the Wisconsin Veterans Employment Initiative, creates the Council on Veterans Employment, requires the Council to advise and assist the Governor and state agencies with the recruitment and employment of veterans in state government.
- **Wyoming** enacted [SF 53](#) (2017), which provides veterans and surviving spouses of veterans an advantage of five percent when a public department uses a numerical scoring system prior to the interview process and 10 percent for disabled veterans. When a public department does not use a numerical scoring system, the advantage given must reasonably approximate the five or 10 percent advantage.

State policymakers may want to consider adopting a mandatory interview option. This involves requiring the hiring authority to offer a qualified individual with a disability an interview, but this does not guarantee that the individual is offered a job.

- **Kentucky's** [HB 338](#) (2019), which revises provisions relating to employment opportunities for service members and their families, relates to interview preference to a competitive classified position.
- **Maryland** enacted [HB 1466](#) (2017), which requires appointing authorities to interview specified disabled veterans under specified circumstances.
- The state of **Vermont** operates a [mandatory interview process](#) for state employment, available to any "qualified individual with a disability" as conforming to the ADA definition.

For many public-sector positions, civil service examinations are a hiring requirement. However, certain individuals with disabilities may need onsite accommodations in a test-taking environment. In other situations, these exams may not be appropriate. Given these factors, some state policymakers are waiving or modifying civil service examinations and/or offering onsite accommodations as needed for job applicants with disabilities.

In several states, people with disabilities applying for state employment may have the option of taking a modified civil service exam, or the exam may be waived altogether.

- In **California**, an Executive Order directed state agencies to fill vacancies through the [Limited Examination and Appointment Program](#) (LEAP), which is designed to facilitate recruitment and hiring of qualified individuals with disabilities. In 2015, California passed [SB 644](#), altering LEAP by providing individuals with developmental disabilities with the

option to obtain civil service certification by successfully completing a 512-hour internship with a state agency in lieu of a written test or LEAP readiness examination.

- **Illinois** offers an [Accommodated Testing Program](#) to ensure that applicants with disabilities can access the exams necessary for state government positions. The Accommodated Testing Program provides individuals with disabilities access to a number of on-site examination accommodations at state assessment centers.

State vocational rehabilitation agencies, public educational institutions and other agencies within the state government already are working with skilled youth and adults seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce. State human resources agencies can make sure they have formalized partnerships with these entities to maximize their pool of potential workers. One step in this direction is to ensure that staff and recipients of vocational rehabilitation services are proficient in the application process for state government jobs. Some states, such as [Illinois](#) and [Maine](#), have more formal partnerships with vocational rehabilitation agencies, in which the vocational rehabilitation agency certifies trained and work-ready candidates for trial work periods, civil service exam exemption or special appointment lists. These partnerships can also support human resource professionals in creating job announcements and qualification standards that encourage applicants with disabilities to apply.

## **Ensure Workplace Accessibility and Universal Design**

### **Workplace Accessibility**

- **Connecticut** enacted [SB 126](#) (2022), an act requiring a study of the accessibility of the state capitol building, legislative office building and related facilities.
- **Illinois** enacted [SB 180](#) (2022), which provides that the General Assembly shall make all efforts to increase the accessibility of the General Assembly for people with disabilities, and provides that the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate shall each appoint an accessibility coordinator who, in consultation with the Architect of the Capitol, shall be responsible for addressing accessibility needs for his or her corresponding house.

### **Reasonable Accommodations**

- **California** enacted [AB 313](#) (2021), which requires that each state agency develop its own reasonable accommodation policy for individuals with disabilities, consistent with state and federal law, to address requests for reasonable accommodations. The bill also requires the department to develop model policies, including a model policy on reasonable accommodation.
- **Minnesota** enacted [HB 63](#) (2021). To determine the appropriate reasonable accommodation, the employer, agency or organization shall initiate an informal, interactive process with the individual with a disability in need of the accommodation. This process should identify the limitations resulting from the disability and any potential reasonable accommodations that could overcome those limitations.
- **Nevada** enacted [SB 179](#) (2021), relating to interpreters. It revised the activities for which registration as an interpreter or real-time captioning provider is required, revised the requirements and professional classifications for registration as an interpreter or real-time captioning provider, provided for the establishment of qualifications to serve as a professional mentor and additional professional classifications in the field of interpreting,

revised certain terminology related to interpreting and provided other matters properly relating thereto.

- **Tennessee** enacted [HB 1578/SB 1183](#) (2021), which provides 36 hours of yearly leave for a state employee who is a veteran with a service-connected disability, of which 30 percent or more is to be used to attend appointments related to the service-connected disability.

### **Centralized Accommodation Funds**

A Centralized Accommodation Fund (CAF) is a consolidated funding strategy to meet reasonable accommodation requests made by employees and applicants with disabilities, rather than requiring each state agency to pay for accommodations out of individual agency budgets. By utilizing a centralized accommodation fund to pay for requests, states can ease the administrative and financial pressure on agency hiring personnel worried about the impact of accommodations on agency budgets.

- The [accommodation fund](#) in **Minnesota** has two goals: to provide equal footing for applicants with disabilities during the hiring process and to create a more accessible workplace. The state's Department of Administration can reimburse up to \$1,000 for current employees' one-time expenses, recognizing that under the ADA there is no limit to expenses reimbursed for applicants and ongoing expenses incurred for current employees unless the agency can demonstrate undue burden. In 2016, the legislature authorized \$200,000 for the fund.
- **Minnesota** has also created a reasonable accommodation fund for employers. [The Department of Employment and Economic Development \(DEED\) Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund \(ERAF\)](#) creates a central fund where small to mid-sized Minnesota employers can request reimbursement for expenses related to providing reasonable accommodations for job applicants and employees with disabilities. The ERAF's purpose is to encourage employment of people with disabilities by reducing any perceived or real financial barriers. In addition to processing reimbursements, the ERAF Coordinator is available for technical assistance (TA) and consultation at no cost to employers.

### **Centralized Expertise on Disability**

- **Alaska's** [ADA Compliance Program](#) embeds ADA coordinators in major state agencies and assists employees with accommodation requests.
- **Oklahoma** passed [HB 2062](#) (2013) to enact a statewide telework program and included language requiring the development of policies and guidance on the use of telework as a workplace accommodation for employees with disabilities.
- Governor Walz of **Minnesota** issued [Executive Order No. 19-14: Providing for State Agency Coordination of the Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (2019) that directs the appointment of a State ADA Coordinator and the appointment of an ADA Coordinator at each agency. The coordinator's duties include acting as the designated agency resource for information and technical assistance regarding compliance with the ADA, including case-by-case interventions, as required and delivering training and technical assistance.
- Governor Parsons of **Missouri** issued [Executive Order No. 19-16](#) (2019) directing the Office of Administration to designate a State Disability Employment Coordinator or Coordinators who shall be responsible for advising all state agencies on disability policy and compliance with disability rights laws; collaborating with and supporting all state

agencies concerning recruitment, hiring and retention of employees with disabilities; and training state employees and managers on disability-related issues.

- **Vermont** utilizes a rigorous and streamlined [Request for Reasonable Accommodation](#) process for state employee accommodation requests. Vermont's process involves a review committee for accommodations exceeding \$500 and when there is a disagreement between department and employee on the reasonable accommodation offered or denial of a request at the department level.

### **Accessible Websites**

- **Alabama's** [IT Universal Accessibility Standard](#) specifies that "just as environmental obstacles can inhibit individuals with certain disabilities, Internet use can also present obstacles for persons with certain disabilities." The object of the policy is "to advise agencies on the use of the minimum requirements for online accessibility for all State of Alabama websites that comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act."
- **Arizona**, through state statute, directs each budget unit of the state to ensure that any information technology developed, procured, maintained or used by the budget unit provides accessibility comparable to and in line with the accessibility standards of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.
- **California's** IT accessibility policy explains that "it is the policy of the State of California that information and services within State Government and provided via electronic and information technology, be accessible to people with disabilities." Further, **California** enacted [AB 434](#) (2017), requiring state agencies to make their respective sites accessible by July 1, 2019. Each state agency is required to achieve conformance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, or any subsequent version, at a minimum Level AA success criterion.
- **Colorado** enacted [HB 1110](#) (2021), which specifies that the Chief Information Officer in the Office of Information Technology shall, consistent with the responsibilities of The Office, promote and monitor the access standards for individuals with a disability in the state's information technology infrastructure, including, but not limited to, architecture. Each state agency is directed to comply with the access standards for individuals with a disability.
- **Hawaii** enacted [SR 5](#) (2021), which directs the Disability and Communication Access Board, in collaboration with the office of enterprise technology services, to convene a working group on accessible government documents. In 2022 **Hawaii** enacted [SB 2144](#), which requires the Office of Enterprise Technology Services, in consultation with the Disability and Communication Access Board and a working group composed of stakeholders, to develop and publish electronic information technology accessibility standards to be implemented by all state entities.
- **Indiana** specifies that if a contractor provides any information technology-related products or services to the state, the contractor shall comply with all IOT standards, policies and guidelines. The contractor agrees that all hardware, software and services provided to or purchased by the state shall be compatible with the principles and goals contained in the electronic and information technology accessibility standards adopted under Section 508 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

- **Iowa** has adopted a [website accessibility standard](#) in which all Web Content Accessibility Guidelines ([WCAG](#)) 2.0 levels A and AA are Iowa's standard for website accessibility.
- **Kentucky** recognizes the relationship between full participation in the workplace and community and the need to ensure accessible ICT, legislating that individuals with disabilities have a right to full participation in life in the commonwealth, which includes the use of advanced technology by employees, program participants and members of the public.
- Governor Walz of **Minnesota** issued [Executive Order No. 19-15: Providing for Increased State Employment of Individuals with Disabilities](#) (2019) that orders the applicable state agency to collaborate with Minnesota IT Services to provide advice and guidance for updating hiring tools to ensure accessibility and usability for all people with disabilities applying for state jobs.
- Governor Parsons of **Missouri** issued [Executive Order No. 19-16](#) (2019) directing the Office of Administration to ensure that the state's web-based hiring portal is accessible for applicants with disabilities.
- **New Hampshire's** [Web Accessibility Initiative](#) requires all state agencies to develop and maintain web and mobile sites that follow universal access standards that conform to regulations from Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. The New Hampshire initiative also applies to all web and mobile state job applications, seeking to remove barriers to application and hiring for individuals with disabilities.
- **New York** updated its [Policy on Accessibility of Information and Communication Technology](#) (2024). This policy recognizes the importance of universal
- accessibility and establishes minimum accessibility requirements to ensure that Information and Communication Technology ("ICT"), including applications, websites, and other digital interfaces, developed, procured, maintained, or used by State Entities are accessible to all users, including those with disabilities.
- **Ohio** updated its Web Accessibility Policy. In 2019, Governor DeWine issued [Executive Order No. 2019-03D - Establishing Ohio as a Disability Inclusion State and Model Employer of Individuals with Disabilities](#) that directs the Office of Information Technology, in consultation with the state ADA Coordinator, to conduct an annual review of the state's web-based hiring portal to ensure it is accessible to applicants with disabilities.
- **Utah** enacted [HB 284](#) (2019), which authorizes the Department of Technology Services to coordinate with executive branch agencies to provide basic agency website standards that address common website design and navigation standards.
- Governor Northam of **Virginia** issued [Executive Order No. 47: Expanding Opportunities for Virginians with Disabilities](#) (2020), which directed the Virginia Information Technology Agency to work with other state agencies to improve the accessibility of the Commonwealth's websites for Virginians with disabilities and encourage similar efforts in the private sector.
- The state of **Washington** adopted new [accessibility standards](#) based on WCAG 2.1.
- A number of states have implemented policies and practices to ensure that the ICT they procure is accessible to all users. A number of states, including [Indiana](#), [Kentucky](#),

[Massachusetts](#), [Minnesota](#) and [Nebraska](#), have also implemented policies and practices to ensure that the ICT they procure is accessible to all users.

### Provide Skills Training

- **Florida** enacted [HB 7003](#) (2016), which implements a mandatory training program for human resources personnel and hiring managers.
- **Illinois** enacted [SB 1136](#) (2019), which requires each state agency to send at least one hiring manager to be trained each year about hiring people with disabilities.
- Governor Walz of **Minnesota** issued two Executive Orders. [Executive Order No. 19-15: Providing for Increased State Employment of Individuals with Disabilities](#) (2019) directed the creation of a plan for accessible training programs for agency hiring managers and supervisors, human resources personnel, and ADA Coordinators. [Executive Order No. 19-14: Providing for State Agency Coordination of the Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (2019) orders the delivery of training and technical assistance to agency managers and supervisors on, among other things, interviewing and accessing information on state disability resources.
- Governor Parson of **Missouri** issued [Executive Order No. 19-16](#) (2019) ordering the Office of Administration and the State Disability Employment Coordinator or Coordinators shall ensure that all state employees participate in initial and periodic disability awareness training to build and sustain a culture of engagement in the workplace which will include discussion of rights to reasonable accommodation in the workplace.
- **Nevada** enacted [AB 365](#) (2021), which requires the training of supervisors and managerial employees concerning implicit bias.
- Governor DeWine of **Ohio** issued [Executive Order No. 2019-03D: Establishing Ohio as a Disability Inclusion State and Model Employer of Individuals with Disabilities](#) (2019). It includes a provision directing applicable agencies to ensure that all state employees participate in regular disability etiquette and awareness training.

### Model SAME Best Practices

- **New York** [EO 31](#) (2023) specifically charges the state's Chief Disability Officer to seek out and partner with private-sector organizations to match individuals with disabilities to employment opportunities.
- **Virginia** [EO 47](#) (2020) directs state leadership to collaborate with private businesses to strengthen workforce pipelines and promote the hiring of qualified individuals with disabilities. It specifically tasks the Department of Veterans Services with placing disabled veterans within private companies certified through the Virginia Values Veterans initiative. Additionally, the Governor encourages the private sector to adopt career-building opportunities and improve website accessibility to ensure full community integration.
- **Virginia** [SB 877](#) (2020) focuses on developing alternative work schedules and specifically tasks the state with developing incentives for private-sector employers to utilize telecommuting, alongside tracking telework participation levels of private-sector employee.

- **Washington EO 02** (2013) convened a Task Force that actively engaged model private-sector companies to share strategies, exchange best practices, and provide technical assistance to boost the employment of people with disabilities across all sectors of the economy.
- **Washington EO 01** (2021) This directly illustrates the strategy of utilizing Business Resource Groups by affirming Washington State Business Resource Groups (including the Disability Network). It directs state agencies to provide reasonable resources, accommodations, and accessible meeting.

### ***Career Readiness and Economic Mobility***

---

While the job market is always evolving, one constant remains: Individuals must develop marketable skills to obtain jobs and remain employed. This is particularly important for people with disabilities who may experience challenges finding and maintaining work or advancing in their careers. Work-based learning (WBL), including apprenticeships, internships, and on-the-job training, provides practical and meaningful opportunities for individuals with disabilities to hone their skills and explore career paths. State and local governments can facilitate career readiness and WBL opportunities for individuals with disabilities (including youth and young adults) that align with education and career development plans and meet state and local workforce needs. States can:

- ✓ **Promote career readiness, development, and planning**, including opportunities for career exploration, job shadowing, and workplace tours; informational interviews; mentorship; career and technical education; and higher education.
- ✓ **Strengthen and expand the infrastructure for WBL experiences**, including service learning, internships, pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships, and other training programs.
- ✓ **Provide job seekers with career supports and services**, including benefits counseling (e.g., Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts) and tools for parents that can help individuals with disabilities access and sustain meaningful employment and financial independence.
- ✓ **Promote innovation and universal design in career pathways programming.**

### **Promote Career Readiness, Development, and Planning**

- **California AB 447** (2023) authorizes and requests the University of California to establish and maintain college programs that include students with intellectual and developmental disabilities at four-year public postsecondary educational institutions. College programs should provide students with a person-centered planning process and the opportunity to pursue an educational credential, including, but not limited to, a degree, certificate, or nondegree credential issued by the institution.
- The **Connecticut** Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education released guidance on [Student Success Plans \(SSPs\)](#) that indicates students with disabilities should be included in the state's career readiness programming and that SSP delivery should be accessible. The Department of Education suggests that SSP documents be attached to IEPs and that the SSP should help inform the annual review and updating of the IEP.

- **Connecticut** [HB 5001](#) (2023) provides support services for persons with an intellectual or developmental disability. The bill provides that the Commissioner of Developmental Services shall produce a plan to establish a Transitional Life Skills College program to provide transitional tools and life skills development for persons with an intellectual disability or other developmental disabilities.
- **Colorado** [HB1255](#) (2022) improves initiatives aimed at enhancing postsecondary education outcomes for students with disabilities in Colorado. It highlights the disparity in completion rates between students with disabilities and their peers, emphasizing the importance of postsecondary education in the job market. The general assembly calls for improved data collection to better understand the experiences of these students.
- **Delaware**, through [14 DE Admin Code 925](#), ensures that every IEP transition plan includes “[t]he child’s strengths, interests, and postsecondary preferences, and plans to make application to high school and career technical educational programs.” The administrative regulations also require that IEP teams include the student’s career technical education teacher or coordinator when that student is active or planning to be involved in career and technical education programming.
- **Florida** enacted [HB 173](#) (2021), which revises the timeline for the development and implementation of an IEP for transition services for a student with disabilities to a postsecondary education and career opportunities. **Florida** also enacted [HB 7045](#) (2021), which changes the eligibility requirements for the transition-to-work program to include all students with disabilities between 17 and 22 who have not received a high school diploma or certificate of completion, rather than just students participating in a certain scholarship program.
- **Illinois** [HB 3224](#) (2023) amends the Children with Disabilities Article of the School Code, and provides that, as part of transition planning, a school district shall provide a student and the parent or guardian of the student with information about the district's career and technical education opportunities and dual credit courses offered by the school district.
- **Illinois** [HB 5276](#) (2024) enhances transition services for children with disabilities. These changes aim to provide a coordinated set of activities that improve both academic and functional achievements, facilitating students' movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, and independent living.
- **Kentucky** [SB 94](#) (2022) amends the Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship Program which aims to provide affordable access to industry-recognized certificates, diplomas, or associate degrees for Kentuckians who have not yet earned a postsecondary degree. This amendment extends eligibility to students with intellectual disabilities enrolled in comprehensive transition and postsecondary programs facilitating access to meaningful credentials that enhance their opportunities for employment.
- The **Maryland** Department of Labor awarded Howard Community College a grant to fund the [Central Maryland Logistics Workforce Pipeline Partnership](#) project at the college. The workforce training program will transition students with disabilities into careers in the logistics industry while helping employers adopt and create more accessible work environments. The project was established in partnership with the Autism Society of Maryland, the Arc of Howard County, the Howard County Office of Workforce Development, and the Maryland State Department of Education Division of Rehabilitation

Service. The partnership will serve 18- to 24- year-old high school completers with disabilities and provide two entry-level certifications: Certified Logistics Associate (CLA) and Certified Logistics Technician (CLT).

- In partnership with the National Disability Institute, Missouri is implementing a STEM Pathways project that in its first year reached 2,500 students with disabilities across the state, and in its second year is piloting community "disability navigator" sites—beginning in Cape Girardeau—to connect youth with disabilities to registered apprenticeship and STEM career opportunities in rural areas.
- **Oklahoma** [HB 3792](#) (2024) establishes the Oklahoma Access and Achievement Act to provide eligible students with intellectual disabilities who are pursuing studies in the State at a Comprehensive Transition and Post-Secondary (CTP) program. **Oklahoma** also enacted [SB 89](#) (2021) which stipulates that children who have IEPs and who satisfy the graduation requirements through their IEPs shall be awarded a standard high school diploma.
- **Rhode Island** provides that the ILP must coordinate with IEPs, 504 Plans, Personal Learning Plans, and English Language Learner programs. The ILP supports changes in instructional placements and key transitions including middle level to high school, high school to post-secondary placement, and transfer across schools and districts.
- The **Texas Summer Earn & Learn** (SEAL) program offers eligible students with disabilities a paid work experience with local employers who, together with its Texas Workforce System -Vocational Rehabilitation partners, can provide the support and accommodations needed to succeed.

### **Strengthen and Expand the Infrastructure for Work-Based Learning (WBL) Experiences**

- Designed through a cooperative agreement between the U.S. Department of Labor and the **Arkansas** Department of Commerce's Division of Workforce Services, the [American Manufacturing Apprenticeship Incentive Fund](#) is designed to incentivize employers nationwide to develop, expand, or join existing advanced manufacturing Registered Apprenticeship programs through a pay-for-performance model. Through the program, eligible Registered Apprenticeship sponsors will receive \$3,500 for each new apprentice hired.
- Launched in 2025, **California's** [Ready, Willing, and Able](#) is an initiative developed by the California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) and the Institute for Workplace Skills and Innovation America (IWSI America). This program is dedicated to creating skills-based apprenticeships that connect individuals with disabilities to high-demand careers across California. With a focus on key industries like health care, IT, renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing, the program equips apprentices with industry-recognized training, mentorship, and career support. Employers benefit from a varied and skilled workforce prepared to meet the challenges of an evolving job market.
- The **Florida** Department of Education's Division of Blind Services (DBS) developed a [Web Accessibility Specialist Registered Apprenticeship Program](#), which trains blind and visually impaired individuals to enhance website accessibility for internet users with any disability. This program also creates a pathway into the information technology arena for clients served by DBS.

- **Indiana** [HB 1160](#) (2023) provides that the commission for higher education may establish an education and career support services pilot program to provide career and support services to adult students of state educational institutions. The bill provides for the establishment of a manufacturing workforce training pilot program to provide training and other services to: (1) individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities; and (2) incumbent workers who are identified to fill higher paying jobs as a result of increased workforce participation by individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities.
- The **Kentucky** [Housing Development Alliance](#) (HDA) [Hope Building](#) program provides employment training for individuals in addiction recovery. The job training and placement program is a collaboration between HDA, the Drug Court, Hickory Hills Recovery Center, Hazard Community and Technical College, and the Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program. It provides paid on-the-job training, part-time schooling towards a construction technology degree, and the chance to garner a job reference.
- **Louisiana** Postsecondary Apprenticeship Pilot for Youth ([PAY-Check](#)) is a three-to-five semester program that enables transition-age youth with disabilities to take classes at Delgado Community College related to specific apprenticeship areas, participate in career development activities, learn community and work skills, and gain employment experience through an apprenticeship program at the University Medical Center. PAY-Check is a collaboration among the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center-Human Development Center, Louisiana Rehabilitation Services, public school systems, and employers in the New Orleans metropolitan area. PAY-Check uses a braided funding approach by utilizing a state-to-federal match via Federal Financial Participation in State Expenditure (FMAP) funding, which is available to all states.
- **Massachusetts'** [Connecting Activities \(CA\)](#) is a Department of Elementary and Secondary Education initiative that leverages a statewide infrastructure to support "college and career readiness" for all students. The CA line item in the state budget establishes public-private partnerships through the 16 local workforce investment boards to connect schools and businesses by providing structured work-based learning experiences for students that support both their academic and employability skill attainment.
- In **Massachusetts**, the [Employment Program for Young Adults with Disabilities](#) provides grants to organizations seeking to improve workforce outcomes for young adults with disabilities. This grant initiative is funded through a General Appropriation Act line item in the state budget.
- In 2026, **Minnesota** launched a [grant](#) intended to help apprenticeship preparation programs expand the services they offer to individuals with disabilities to successfully complete a preparation program and enroll in a registered apprenticeship program.
- **Missouri's** [Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development](#) leads a statewide effort to expand registered apprenticeship opportunities for individuals with disabilities, coordinating a bimonthly Missouri Apprenticeship Team that brings together the U.S. Department of Labor, higher education institutions, secondary CTE schools, employers, and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). Missouri developed an enhanced disability disclosure form—in partnership with VR—that clearly explains the purpose of the question, defines qualifying disabilities, and provides state-specific resources for both apprentices and employers, contributing to Missouri's status as the leading state in reported

apprenticeship participation by people with disabilities, with approximately 800 of its 22,000+ active apprentices self-identifying.

- **Nebraska's** [WAGES](#) is a six-week work-based learning experience program held annually for blind and visually impaired youth ages 16 to 21. Participants live on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus and engage in work opportunities, professional skills training, self-advocacy activities, transportation practice, and more.
- **New York's** [Developmental Disabilities Manufacturing Apprenticeship](#) aims to improve access for people with developmental disabilities to employment opportunities in the manufacturing industry through pre-apprenticeship training and wrap around supports that leads to employment and registered apprenticeship with business partners.
- **New York's** [Office of Mental Health](#) (OMH) is actively developing numerous registered apprenticeship tracks—one aligned with a new paraprofessional behavioral health credential, [peer support specialists](#) and one for bachelor-level social work students—leveraging the New York State Department of Labor's newly released "social service assistant" trade. OMH is also partnering with SUNY to offer paid mental health internships for community college students at \$16-\$18/hour, placing them with OMH-licensed provider agencies; the program launched as a three-school pilot in Spring 2025 and expanded to five schools by Spring 2026, with funding secured through 2028.
- The **Ohio** [Vocational Apprentice Program](#) enables students and adults with disabilities who are eligible for services from Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD)—Ohio's Vocational Rehabilitation agency—to gain valuable work experience and exposure and access to state government employment through paid apprenticeships within state agencies. OOD partners with Ohio agencies, including the Office of Budget and Management, Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture, to identify their workforce needs and develop apprenticeship opportunities that align with the employment and educational goals of OOD-eligible participants. Apprentices have been hired into permanent employment with state or county agencies with an average starting wage of \$20/hour. Positions include Capital Finance Analyst, Information Technologist, Customer Service Assistant, Graphic Designer, Mail Room, Food Service Worker, and Office Professional.
- [TennCare](#), **Tennessee's** Medicaid program, offers internship programs for individuals with disabilities to explore career pathways, develop professional skills, and gain experience in state government. Through this program, interns have the opportunity to: strengthen their technical and interpersonal skills; contribute to rewarding work that improves the lives of Tennesseans; gain exposure to careers in Medicaid, disability-related programs, and state government; and build valuable professional networks and connections. The program partners with higher education programs at local colleges and universities, as well as the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center in Smyrna, with placements typically running six weeks to three months and providing individualized mentorship, job coaching supports, and hands-on experience within TennCare's Long-Term Services and Supports and communications teams.
- In **Texas**, the [Hugs Training Academy](#) provides adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities entry-level skills and training to prepare them to enter the workforce in the culinary and hospitality industries.

- [Adaptive Construction Solutions \(ACS\)](#), is an [apprenticeship intermediary](#) in **Texas** that has been helping apprentices train for careers in clean energy and steel construction for more than 10 years. ACS has successfully made its programs accessible to people with disabilities, including disabled veterans.
- The [Texas SEAL program](#) engages students ages 14 to 22 who have disabilities and are in secondary and postsecondary education, offering them paid work experiences during the summer when students are not in school. SEAL combines two of the WIOA-mandated pre-employment transition services: work-readiness training and WBLEs. The program is intended to help students develop skills; gain work experience; and learn about job opportunities in different industries, particularly for in-demand jobs.
- Several state of **Utah** agencies, including the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation, offer [Work Ability Internships](#) for people with disabilities. These internships provided paid, work-based learning experiences in entry and mid-level positions. The WAI program serves to help individuals with disabilities learn new skills, establish a network of professional contacts, explore career paths in state government and increase readiness to obtain permanent employment.

### **Provide Job Seekers with Career Supports and Services**

- **Arkansas** [HB 1728](#) (2025) amends the Comprehensive Arkansas Higher Education Annual Report to include reporting on students receiving accommodations for a disability to examine the postsecondary services, supports, and accommodations necessary for students with disabilities. In order to meet the economic demands of the state, it is essential to collect significant data and examine the postsecondary services, supports, and accommodations necessary for students with disabilities to improve postsecondary education and career outcomes.
- **Arkansas** [PROMISE](#) offered summer work experiences to youth as part of a comprehensive set of transition services and supports. The project contracted with the state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency to obtain access to 10 transition specialists who provided career-exploration services to youth and facilitated their work experiences. These staff also facilitated youth's applications for VR services. The state VR agency paid the youth's wages as part of its WIOA requirements for pre-employment transition services.
- **California's** [Able-Disabled Advocacy Youth Training Program](#) uses a youth-centered approach to overcome local service gaps, address the support needs of youth, and ensure labor market and skills outcomes. Its services include:
  - Universal access, accommodations, and personal counseling to assist youth in overcoming mental health, substance abuse, and physical challenges;
  - Ongoing career assessments and intensive career counseling to identify and address required skill levels and the lack of work experience;
  - Extensive labor market information, academic advising, and career mentoring to direct career paths;
  - Skills upgrading leading to high school completion and professional industry credentials;

- Financial management, benefits, and “Disability 101” counseling and work readiness training;
  - Housing, transportation, childcare, and other assistance; and
  - A comprehensive continuum of other financial support needed to succeed.
- **Connecticut** [SB 369](#) (2022) provides for the establishment and administration of ABLE accounts, allowing individuals with disabilities to save for qualified expenses without affecting their eligibility for assistance programs, including eligibility for need-based, institutional aid grants offered to an individual at the public eligible educational institutions in the state.
- **Idaho** [SB 1399](#) (2022) establishes an Extended Employment Services Program within Idaho's Department of Health and Welfare, aimed at enhancing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This program is designed to provide long-term maintenance services that assist participants in gaining and sustaining employment skills through community-based supported employment and work services.
- In 2022, **Illinois** enacted [HB 5225](#), which created the Job Training Assistance and Support Services Pilot Program Act. This Act requires that the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity develop a five-year Apprentice Assistance and Support Services Pilot Program that provides transportation assistance and a childcare subsidy to eligible individuals participating in a qualified apprenticeship, with priority given to several groups, including people with disabilities.
- **Illinois** [SB 99](#) (2023) requires institutions to adopt policies that facilitate an interactive process for providing reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities.
- **Kentucky** [SB 160](#) (2023) establishes tax exemptions for STABLE Kentucky accounts and any investment income earned, allowing individuals with disabilities to save without incurring state taxes. Additionally, funds in these accounts are protected from attachment, execution, or garnishment, and are disregarded when determining eligibility for public assistance programs, enhancing financial security for account holders. Qualified withdrawals for disability-related expenses are exempt from Kentucky income tax, encouraging individuals to utilize these accounts for necessary expenditures.
- **Maine** [HP 10](#) (2026) establishes the Higher Education Grant Program in Maine, which aims to enhance postsecondary educational opportunities and support employability for students with intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities, or autism spectrum disorder. To qualify for these grants a proposed program must provide students with intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities or autism spectrum disorder with the supports and experiences necessary to seek and sustain competitive employment.
- **New Jersey** [SB 3067](#) (2020) establishes a five-year Apprentice Assistance and Support Services Pilot Program, which provides a transportation mileage cost reimbursement and a childcare subsidy through the “revenue in the Workforce Development Partnership Fund, which is currently reserved for employment and training purposes.”
- As of 2025, **Pennsylvania** employers are eligible to claim a [25% state tax credit](#) against the aggregate amount of all matching contributions to employee ABLE accounts of up to \$500 per employee per tax year.

- **South Carolina** [SR 392](#) (2025) recognizes the state as the Technology First State, committed to the exploration and understanding of enabling and assistive technology supports that may allow all South Carolinians with disabilities greater opportunity to live independent and fulfilling lives.
- **Virginia** [HB1089](#) (2024) enhances the educational framework for children with disabilities. The bill also establishes special education family support centers.
- **Wisconsin** [SB 398](#) (2024) creates a nonrefundable income tax credit for the costs of transportation services paid by a person considered blind for federal income tax purposes for certain transportation between the person's residence and place of employment. The services eligible for this credit must be provided by mass transit, paratransit, taxicab, or a transportation network company. The credit is equal to 50 percent of the costs of those transportation services paid during a taxable year and is limited to a maximum credit of \$1,500 per taxable year.

### **Promote Innovation and Universal Design in Career Pathways and Programming**

- **California** [AB 1938](#) (2024) requires local educational agencies, including school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools, to implement universal design for learning initiatives for students aged 0 to 22 who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind. It emphasizes the importance of addressing the full language access needs of these students when determining their educational placements and services. Additionally, [AB 2821](#) (2024) created a Disability Access and Compliance Training Program for community college campuses, aimed at educating personnel on legal responsibilities regarding accommodations, accessibility in coursework, and addressing anti-disability stigma. This training is expected to be integrated into existing onboarding processes for staff.
- Connecticut's [Industry Specific Training and Placement Program](#) (ISTPP) responds to the needs of businesses by creating a customized plan that utilizes Universal Design to identify which skills, knowledge bases, and abilities are important for their employees to possess. After a business determines which positions they most need to fill, BRS creates a customized plan and training curriculum that adheres to the standards set by the business. ISTPPs include both on-the-job and classroom-based training. The program is implemented by BRS, as well as one of the two CRPs approved to provide ISTPP services, in accordance with the plan tailored to a business. By understanding and accommodating industry needs, this program creates new competitive integrated employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- The **New Hampshire** Department of Education partnered with the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) to create [New Hampshire's Universal Design for Learning Innovation Network](#) to train educators, including career and technical education teachers, in universal design. Since the launch of the partnership in 2018, New Hampshire and CAST have trained 500 educators across 70 schools through school-based instruction, online learning, and statewide workshops. Professional development in universal design principles for educators and employers helps them ensure that training materials, environments, and assessment methods are accessible to all apprentices, regardless of their abilities or learning styles.
- In **New Jersey**, [SB 147](#) (2023) requires the Department of Transportation to implement a complete streets policy. The complete streets policy must require the consideration and

implementation of design elements and infrastructure improvement projects that promote the ability of persons with autism spectrum disorder and persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities to travel independently. The bill also requires the department to develop universal design concepts that advance the mobility options for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities and persons with autism spectrum disorder. Additionally, the department is required to develop guidance and policies concerning the means by which the universal design concepts will be incorporated into the planning, design, construction, maintenance, and operation of new and rehabilitated public highways and public transportation projects.

- **Vermont** [HB 452](#) (2023) outlines amendments to Vermont's apprenticeship laws aimed at expanding workforce opportunities and enhancing the quality and accessibility of apprenticeship programs. It emphasizes the importance of accessibility for individuals with disabilities.
- **Virginia** [HB 1805](#) (2024) outlines amendments to the Code of Virginia that focus on enhancing support for individuals with disabilities in public institutions of higher education. These changes emphasize the importance of documenting disabilities to ensure that students can access necessary accommodations, thereby improving the transition from secondary education to higher education.

### ***Behavioral Health at Work***

---

Behavioral health refers to the topics of mental distress, mental health conditions, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, and substance use. An estimated 61.5 million Americans live with a behavioral health condition. Fostering a behavioral health-friendly and recovery-ready workplace<sup>2</sup> is crucial for overall productivity, employee well-being, and organizational success. Further, as the number of people with mental health conditions and substance use disorder increases, so does the need to recruit and hire skilled professionals to deliver behavioral health services. More than 122 million Americans live in areas with a shortage of behavioral health workers. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity to steer more job seekers into the behavioral health workforce, including people with disabilities. State and local governments can enact employment policies that extend to individuals with mental health and substance use conditions and encourage employment of people with disabilities to address the behavioral health workforce shortage. States can:

- ✓ **Strengthen workers' health insurance coverage** for mental health conditions and substance use disorder.
- ✓ **Strengthen access to workplace care and supports** for individuals with mental health conditions or substance use disorder, including employee assistance programs (EAPs), stay-at-work/return-to-work initiatives, and access to counseling and other support services.
- ✓ **Expand the behavioral health workforce** to include people with disabilities by engaging in interstate licensure reciprocity, modifying behavioral health professional requirements, incentivizing training for mental health professionals, and establishing student loan repayment programs.

---

<sup>2</sup> Recovery-Ready Workplace: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/RRW-hub/Recovery-ready-workplace>

- ✓ **Address behavioral health disparities for rural workers** by expanding access to care through broadband deployment, increased access through telehealth, and services tailored to community needs.

### **Strengthen Workers' Health Insurance Coverage**

- **Connecticut** [SB 164](#) (2019) included certain mental or emotional impairments within the definition of personal injury under the workers' compensation statutes. It expanded workers' compensation coverage in certain situations that result in mental or emotional impairment.
- **Colorado** [HB 1068](#) (2021) added a requirement, as part of mandatory health insurance coverage of preventive health care services, that health plans cover an annual mental health wellness examination of up to 60 minutes performed by a qualified mental health care provider. The coverage must:
  - Be comparable to the coverage of a physical examination;
  - Comply with the requirements of federal mental health parity laws; and
  - Not require any deductibles, copayments, or coinsurance for the mental health wellness examination.
- **Colorado** [SB 26](#) (2020) established that visual or audible exposure to serious bodily injury or death (or the immediate aftermath of serious bodily injury or death) of one or more people as the result of a violent event, intentional act of another person, or accident is a psychologically traumatic event to determine eligibility for workers' compensation benefits.
- **Illinois** [HB 2595](#) (2021) stated that during the process of amending, delivering, issuing, or renewing a group or individual accident policy or health insurance, every insurance provider is required to offer coverage for essential treatments of mental, emotional, nervous, or SUD or conditions. This includes qualified health plans available through the health insurance marketplace in the state and Medicaid-managed care organizations.
- **Indiana** [SB 165](#) (2016) required the Healthy Indiana Plan to cover mental health and SUD services. It also stated that the plan cannot use treatment limitations or financial requirements for mental health or SUD if there are no similar limitations or requirements for medical or surgical conditions.
- **Massachusetts** [SB 3097](#) (2022) improved enforcement of parity laws by creating a clear structure for the Division of Insurance to receive and investigate parity complaints to ensure their timely resolution.
- **New Jersey** [Statute § 10:5-12](#) (2016) specified that employees with disabilities, including mental *health conditions*, cannot be discriminated against in hiring, pay and compensation, promotion consideration, training, layoffs or firing.
- **Texas** [HB 18](#) (2025) provides grants to rural hospitals and clinics for telemedicine equipment and services. The legislation emphasizes the importance of telehealth in addressing rural health and mental health care needs.
- **Virginia** [SB 842](#) (2025) aims to enhance broadband access services specifically for mobile health clinics. This initiative is part of a broader effort to improve telehealth services across the state.

- **Virginia** [HB 1848](#) (2021) added discrimination based on disability as an unlawful discriminatory practice under the Virginia Human Rights Act. The bill also required employers to make reasonable accommodations for the known physical and mental impairment of an otherwise qualified person with a disability, if necessary, to assist the person in performing a particular job, unless the employer can demonstrate that the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the employer.
- **Washington** [SB 5313](#) (2021) enacted unfair insurance practice laws related to the cancellation, refusal to issue, or refusal to renew insurance to any person because of, among other things, sensory, mental, or physical disability.

### **Strengthen Access to Workplace Care and Supports**

- **Indiana** [Public Law 195](#) (2018) permitted (but did not require) employers to offer employees who fail drug screenings an opportunity to retain employment if they participate in drug education and addiction treatment programs.
- **Iowa's** EAP offers no-cost, confidential resources and services to help state full- and part-time employees and family members address challenges that may impact job performance, affect well-being, and take a toll on overall health.
- The **Nebraska** Department of Health and Human Services has taken a number of steps to [expand worksite wellness programs among businesses](#), including by publishing a "[Worksite Wellness Toolkit](#)." The toolkit serves as a guide to organizations in developing workplace wellness programs and suggests that organizations include mention of "mental well-being" in their program mission statements.
- The **North Dakota** Department of Health developed the [North Dakota Worksite Wellness Program](#), which organizes resources and provides trainings to help businesses develop comprehensive worksite wellness programs. In addition, the department has an overarching wellness committee that provides technical assistance support for department worksite wellness programs. The [Employer Based Wellness Program](#) allows participating employers to receive a 1% health insurance premium discount for promoting wellness initiatives for employees at their worksites.
- **Oklahoma** developed [Thrive](#), a wellness program for state employees that includes emotional well-being as one of its key pillars.
- **Wisconsin** [SB 73](#) (2013) created an income and franchise tax credit for workplace wellness programs, which can include programs or services around stress management. Employers receive a credit of 30% of the amount they paid to provide a workplace wellness program.
- **Wyoming** [SB 112](#) (2023) provided an EAP to state employees with short-term counselling, legal benefits, financial benefits counselling and work-life benefits consultations. The bill also mandated the confidentiality of communications and counselling sessions by peer support specialists.

### **Expand the Behavioral Health Workforce**

- **Arkansas** [Act 260](#) (2023) created the Counseling Compact in Arkansas. The purpose of this compact is to facilitate interstate practice of licensed professional counselors with the goal of improving public access to professional counseling services. It allows licensed

professional counselors in Arkansas to treat clients in person or via telehealth in other compact member states.

- **California** [AB 666](#) (2022) required a comprehensive assessment on the state of the SUD workforce as well as barriers to entry into the SUD workforce. The bill also authorized increased workforce development programming for SUD professionals.
- **Connecticut** [HB 5001](#) (2023) established a Human Services Career Pipeline program, intended to facilitate collaboration between workforce boards and educational institutions as they develop career pathways. The program is intended to ensure that a sufficient number of trained providers are available to serve the needs of persons in the state with developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, cognitive impairment or mental [*health conditions*], as well as elderly persons. The bill also mandated that the Chief Workforce Officer consult with Mental Health and Addiction Services and other disability agencies to identify: (1) the greatest needs for human services providers and (2) barriers to hiring and retaining qualified providers.
- **Florida** [Statute 29 § 397.417](#) (2023) requires certified recovery peer specialists to complete 3,000 hours of supervised work or volunteer experience and 40 hours of training or obtain a certificate of completion from a program approved by Mental Health America.
- **Idaho** created a Behavioral Health Council that developed a comprehensive workforce plan to increase licensed and/or certified behavioral health professionals. The plan includes recommendations for promoting careers in behavioral health and providing more resources for training and in-state degrees. It also recommends expanding tuition reimbursement opportunities for those studying to work in the behavioral health field and expanding behavioral health care options.
- **Iowa's** [Health Careers](#) pilot supports registered apprenticeship programs that help students pursue nursing pathways. The 2023 program expands opportunities for health care apprenticeships to include Emergency Medical Technicians, Registered Nurses, Direct Support Professionals, Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Specialists, and other critical occupations. At least four 2023 awardees have a training focus on behavioral health care apprenticeships.
- **Kentucky** [HB 505](#) (2024) set training and registration requirements for alcohol and drug peer support specialists.
- **Maine** [HB 631](#) (2021) allowed Maine psychologists to provide services to clients while they are out-of-state through the Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact (PSYPACT). PSYPACT was created to facilitate telehealth and temporary in-person, face-to-face practice of psychology across jurisdictional boundaries. Maine psychologists must possess an active "E.Passport" issued by the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards (ASPPB) to provide telehealth services or possess an active Interjurisdictional Practice Certificate (IPC) from the ASPPB to provide in-person services under the compact. As of 2023, [26 states](#) had passed laws allowing such interstate practice.
- **Minnesota** [Statute §144.1501](#) (2022) created a Rural Physician Loan Forgiveness Program for family practice, obstetrics, gynecology, pediatrics, internal medicine, and psychiatry physicians.

- **Nevada** [SB 44](#) (2021) required agencies to examine and update their licensing and certification requirements to lower barriers to entry. Notably, this bill allowed people who had received their behavioral health education from a foreign institution to apply for licensure if they meet the other requirements. Another change allowed for expedited licensure for military spouses, military personnel and veterans.
- **New York's** [Office of Mental Health](#) (OMH) is actively developing numerous registered apprenticeship tracks—one aligned with a new paraprofessional behavioral health credential, [peer support specialists](#) and one for bachelor-level social work students—leveraging the New York State Department of Labor's newly released "social service assistant" trade.
- **Oklahoma** [SB 773](#) (2019) established the "Oklahoma Mental Health Loan Repayment Act," requiring the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services to administer the Oklahoma Mental Health Loan Repayment Program. The program is intended to provide educational loan repayment assistance for mental health or substance abuse treatment providers who provide services in Health Professional Shortage Areas (for mental health).
- **Pennsylvania** [HR 193](#) (2019) requested a study on the mental health care workforce, including substantial challenges and possible solutions. The [published report](#), developed by the PA Joint State Government Commission, provides recommendations, such as utilizing integrated care models and developing additional psychiatric residency positions in the state.
- **Utah** [HB 468](#) (2023) defined a peer support specialist as an individual who has a disability or a family member with a disability or is in recovery from a mental [*health condition*] or SUD and uses personal experience to provide support, guidance or services to promote resilience and recovery. The bill also required a comprehensive review of an applicant's background if the applicant is applying to work in a program as a peer support provider.

### **Address Behavioral Health Disparities for Rural Workers**

- **Colorado** enacted [SB 055](#) (2024), which created the Agricultural and Rural Community Behavioral Health Program and Work Group to examine usage of mental health services by farmers, ranchers, other workers in the agriculture industry, and their families. The work group will compile best practices, identify gaps, engage stakeholders, collect and examine data, and report its findings and recommendations.
- **Hawaii** [SR 30](#) (2023), a senate resolution, encouraged the state to explore mental health service gaps through efforts to recognize and address the locations of mental health facilities, clean and sober homes, homeless shelters, and other supportive living homes across the island of Oahu. The resolution emphasized examining the prevalence of these facilities along the Waianae Coast and requested that Care Oahu consult with stakeholders.
- **Minnesota** created a Rural Health Advisory Committee to assess mental health care in rural areas. After its research, the committee recommended expanding recruitment efforts, decreasing barriers to training, greater mental health collaboration in primary care and extending the careers of retiring workers.

- **Montana** [SJ 479](#) (2025) is a joint resolution that calls for an interim survey of behavioral health services in Montana, addressing the significant challenges in accessing both inpatient and outpatient mental health care. The resolution highlights the insufficient number of providers to meet the mental health needs of the state’s residents. The survey aims to evaluate the availability and geographic distribution of various mental health resources.
- The **Oklahoma** Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse offers live data dashboards to highlight statewide information on mental health and substance misuse. For instance, its [Drug Overdose Dashboard](#) includes percentages of substance misuse history and mental illness broken down by district/county, as well as other factors. The Mental Health Dashboard includes information on efforts to increase attendance at trauma trainings, promote usage of the national 988 telephone line for people in crisis, and other focuses.
- **Tennessee** [SB 0298](#) (2021) required state medical colleges and institutions to administer residency programs for psychiatrists in rural areas.

### ***Stay-at-Work and Return-to-Work***

---

Each year, millions of U.S. workers experience the onset of an illness or injury, or a change in a medical condition that challenges their ability to work. Many of these workers are at risk of leaving the labor force, especially if they do not receive timely and effective SAW/RTW supports. When faced with an injury or illness, staying connected to the workforce can be personally, financially, and economically beneficial. In addition, when workers exit the labor force, federal and state governments lose tax revenue and public programs often foot the bill for income support and health care services. State and local governments can enact policies that support the retention of employees in the event of injury or illness (on or off the job) or change in status of an individual’s disability. States can:

- ✓ **Establish SAW/RTW programs in the private and public sectors**, including appointing RTW coordinators, providing ill or injured individuals with VR services, and/or offering benefits counseling.
- ✓ **Provide employer incentives**, subsidies, and/or grants to establish SAW/RTW programs.
- ✓ **Facilitate connections between employers, health care providers, and insurers**, including providing access to best and promising practices.
- ✓ **Offer employee incentive, wellness, and injury prevention programs.**

### **Establish SAW/RTW Programs in the Private and Public Sectors**

- **Alabama’s** Vocational Rehabilitation Services provides SAW/RTW services to state residents with disabilities and employers seeking to retain/return valued workers. [Alabama’s Retaining a Valued Employee \(RAVE\) Program](#) assists employers in retaining workers whose job duties, job performance, and/or promotional ability is affected by an injury, illness, or disability, whether the source of the limitation is occupational or non-occupational. A professional team, comprised of a vocational rehabilitation counselor, a Business Relations Consultant, and a Rehabilitation Engineer, works directly with the employer and employee to assess, identify, and provide needed consultation, case

management, accommodations, modifications, and other services, to facilitate successful SAW/RTW outcomes.

- The State of **Delaware** Department of Human Resources administers a Return to Work (RTW) program through its [Disability Insurance Program](#) designed to support employees in safely and efficiently returning to work following an illness or injury. The program provides coordinated assistance through a Return-to-Work Coordinator who works with employees, supervisors, human resources, and medical providers to facilitate transitions back to work, including through modified duties, part-time arrangements, or reasonable accommodations.
- The **North Dakota** Department of Health and Human Services provides an [Unintentional Injury Prevention Data Dashboard](#) designed to give a statewide picture of injury trends, risk factors, and outcomes. The dashboard compiles data from sources such as vital records and other public health systems to identify the leading causes of injury-related deaths and harm across the state.
- The **Oregon** [Employer-at-Injury Program](#) encourages the early return to work of injured workers by helping lower an employer's early return-to-work costs and claim costs. The insurer helps the employer develop transitional work and request reimbursement for its costs. Wage subsidy repays the employer for 50 percent of the early return-to-work gross wages for up to 66 workdays within a 24-consecutive-month period.

### **Provide Employer Incentives**

- In 2023, **Minnesota** created a central fund where small to mid-sized Minnesota employers can request reimbursement for expenses related to providing reasonable accommodations for job applicants and employees with disabilities. The Legislature ([2023 Minn. Laws, Chap. 53, Art. 15, Sec. 31, Subd. 9](#)) appropriated \$4,000,000 for this pilot project. In addition to processing reimbursements, an Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund (ERAF) Coordinator is available for technical assistance and consultation at no cost to employers.
- **Utah** [HB 333](#) (2022) established grants for business entities offering innovative employee RTW programs.

### **Facilitate Connections Between Employers, Health Care Providers, and Insurers**

- The **Georgia** [FOCUS Safety, Care, and Recovery Program](#) works with physicians to ensure the transitional or alternative work aligns with the worker's medical limitations.
- The **Texas** [Department of Insurance](#) provides detailed guidance on roles and responsibilities of health care providers and insurers in RTW coordination services. Further, under [Texas Labor Code § 413.021](#) workers' compensation insurance carriers must provide *ongoing* RTW coordination services to participating employers when an injured employee may lose time from work. These services may include job analysis to identify the physical demands of a job, job modification and restructuring assessments as necessary to match job requirements with the functional capacity of an employee; and medical or vocational case management to coordinate the efforts of the employer, the treating doctor, and the injured employee to achieve timely return to work.
- The **Washington** State Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) funds the [Centers of Occupational Health and Education \(COHE\)](#), which provide guidance for medical

providers to apply occupational health best practices for individuals with work-related health conditions. Health care providers affiliated with COHE receive training in four specific occupational health best practices to use with workers' compensation patients who are at risk of labor force separation due to their illness or injury. This includes:

- Submitting timely and complete forms for initiation of a claim; a complete Report of Accident in two business days or less;
- Developing an activity plan, which communicates the worker's ability to participate in work activities, activity restrictions, and the provider's treatment plans;
- Communicating directly with COHE staff and employers when injured workers are off or expected to be off work or have restrictions; and
- Assessing the injured worker's barriers to RTW and partnering with L&I's claim managers and others on a plan to overcome them.

### **Offer Employee Incentive, Wellness, and Injury Prevention Programs**

- The **Kentucky LivingWell Program** is a comprehensive wellness initiative designed to improve employee health, support preventive care, and create a culture of well-being across state agencies. The program provides a structured framework for organizations to promote physical, mental, and behavioral health through education, engagement, and workplace-based initiatives.
- **Massachusetts** firms participating in the workers' compensation program receive a premium credit for enrolling in a **Qualified Loss Management Program**. The purpose of this innovative program is to apply prospective credit, for a period of up to four years, to the premium of assigned risk insureds who subscribe to a qualified loss management firm and remain in such firm's Loss Management Program during that period.
- **New York SB 5081** (2024) establishes a comprehensive Injury Reduction Program to improve workplace safety and reduce injury rates in New York's warehouse industry.

### **Private-Sector Engagement**

---

The workforce system must educate, train, and prepare the American workforce to meet the needs of employers. Policymakers can also increase labor force participation, reduce workforce shortages, and strengthen the local economy by supporting businesses in recruiting, hiring, retaining, and advancing talented employees, including workers with disabilities. Central to policymakers' success is cultivating strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with the private sector. State and local governments can advance policies that build the capacity of private- and nonprofit-sector employers to recruit, hire, train, and retain disabled workers. States can:

- ✓ **Provide businesses with technical assistance and education** on the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities; strategies for recruiting, hiring, and retaining workers with disabilities; creating accessible environments; and providing reasonable accommodations.
- ✓ **Establish tax credits and incentives** to encourage businesses to hire and retain qualified applicants with disabilities, including incentives for providing employment supports (e.g., reasonable accommodations, transportation, and childcare).

- ✓ **Encourage disability- and disabled veteran-owned businesses and those that employ individuals with disabilities to participate in state procurement.**
- ✓ **Create public-private partnerships** to facilitate collaboration around disability employment, including the development of talent pipelines linking businesses with qualified disabled applicants.
- ✓ **Support entities designing and deploying emerging technologies**, such as artificial intelligence, in exploring ways technology can be leveraged to improve accessibility and maximize benefits for people with disabilities.
- ✓ **Expand accessible transportation options**, including leveraging funding, public-private partnerships, and innovative transportation models.

### **Provide Businesses with Technical Assistance and Education**

- The **Florida** [Governor’s Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities](#) has established an employer help desk within the [Abilities Work web portal](#), part of the Employ Florida Marketplace, to provide a single point of contact to assist employers in navigating state and federal disability support systems.
- Every March since 1989, the **Indiana** [Governor’s Council for People with Disabilities](#) has hosted a statewide disability awareness month with a unique theme each year.
- **New Jersey** enacted [S 4210/A 6062](#) (2022), which requires the state to establish a loan program to assist certain businesses with funding to provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities.
- **Ohio’s** [Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities](#) (OOD) works with partners in business, education and nonprofit organizations to facilitate customized employment plans for Ohioans with disabilities and help Ohio companies recruit and retain employees with disabilities. It is the sole agency administering the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs in Ohio. There are three bureaus under the OOD that work on services, vocational rehabilitation and disability determination. The program also emphasizes business engagement.
- The **Rhode Island** [Governor’s Commission on Disability](#) provides support to state agencies, people with disabilities and businesses looking to increase disability employment. The commission offers resources to businesses on ADA compliance, reasonable accommodations and recruitment.
- **South Dakota** is sending a message that private-sector businesses are important partners in the state’s recent disability employment efforts. Through its Employment Works Task Force and [Ability for Hire](#) initiative, South Dakota is involving the private sector at the earliest stages of policy development and recognizing the positive impact made by employers of people with disabilities through public outreach campaigns.
- Under the leadership of **South Dakota** Governor Daugaard, who was raised by parents with disabilities, the state created the [Employment Works Task Force](#), which focused on strategies to specifically engage businesses. The task force included business community members, individuals with disabilities and family members, legislators, health care providers, nonprofit representatives and state government staff. The group identified successful strategies and actionable next steps to enhance employment. It should be

noted that South Dakota has one of the highest employment rates of people with disabilities in the U.S.

- **Utah's** [Work Ability](#) program, headed by the Utah Department of Health, "...strives to link employers in the business community with the qualified workforce of people with disabilities. Goals include increased communication, reduction of barriers and creation of a comprehensive system of work incentives and supports for both the employer and the individual with disabilities."
- **Washington** Governor Inslee issued an [Executive Order](#) directing the Office of Financial Management to convene a task force for the purpose of assisting state agencies with recruitment and retention of people with disabilities. Because the state is one among many employers in Washington, the task force is engaging model private-sector companies to share strategies, exchange best practices and provide technical assistance to boost the employment of people with disabilities in all sectors.

### **Establish Tax Credits and Incentives**

- **North Dakota** passed [HB 1405](#) (2021), which extends an existing provision relating to an income tax credit for the employment of individuals with developmental disabilities or severe mental illness and amends and reenacts provisions relating to an income tax credit for the employment of individuals with developmental disabilities or severe mental illness. The credit allowed under this section equals 25 percent of up to \$6,000 in wages paid annually by the taxpayer for each employee with a developmental disability or severe mental illness, if the Department of Human Services' Vocational Rehabilitation Division determines the individual has a most significant disability, is eligible for services and requires customized employment in order to obtain competitive integrated employment.
- **Iowa** provides employers with a tax credit of 65 percent of wages paid in the first 12 months, up to \$20,000 per employee, for people with disabilities. A person with a disability is defined as, "someone who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a history of impairment, is regarded as having an impairment, qualifies for the targeted jobs tax credit as a person with a disability undergoing vocational rehabilitation or has been certified by the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation as having a disability." Impairment includes, but is not limited to, psychological disorders and conditions, cosmetic disfigurement, anatomical loss and any mental or psychological disorder.

### **Encourage Disability- and Disabled Veteran-owned Businesses and those that Employ Individuals with Disabilities to Participate in State Procurement**

- **Oregon** enacted [HB2295](#) (2023) which broadens public contracting preferences for businesses that service-disabled veterans own to include all veteran-owned businesses.

### **Create Public Private Partnerships**

- Originally launched as a collaboration between the **Florida** State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and Hyatt Hotels, [Hands On @Hyatt](#) is a workplace training program. Students with disabilities are temporary, paid employees of Hyatt Hotels during their two-week internship. This is a residential program that provides lodging, meals and local transportation. The program is currently partnered with 35 hotels and 15 state vocational rehabilitation agencies.

- [Friends of STABLE Kentucky](#) is a public-private partnership launched to encourage employers to embrace the opportunities that STABLE Kentucky can provide for their employees with disabilities and to increase awareness of and participation in STABLE Kentucky's ABLÉ to Work expansion. This initiative highlights businesses, organizations, and government agencies committed to the financial prosperity and well-being for people with disabilities.
- The [Partnership for Inclusive Internships \(PII\)](#) is a public-private partnership developed by AHRC New York City in **New York** to foster hiring of people with disabilities within New York City and State government through an internship program. The Partnership for Inclusive Internships Program works with the [New York State Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Service - Vocational Rehabilitation](#) (ACCES-VR) and [New York State Commission for the Blind](#) (NYSCB) to provide internships or community work experiences for people with disabilities.
- **Utah's** [PWDNET job opening program](#) allows businesses that have undergone accommodations and disability hiring training to flag job postings on the statewide job board, thus encouraging people with disabilities to apply.

### **Support Entities Designing and Deploying Emerging Technologies**

- **Colorado** [SB 24-205](#) (2024) requires a developer of an AI system (high-risk system) to use reasonable care to protect consumers from any known or foreseeable risks of algorithmic discrimination in the system using AI. The law identifies hiring, compensation, promotion, performance management, and termination as high-risk areas when using AI technology. Employers in Colorado with more than 50 employees will have certain obligations when AI is involved in the decision-making processes affecting personnel. Specifically, the Colorado law was developed to protect consumers from "algorithmic discrimination." The legislation defines algorithmic discrimination as any condition in which an AI system results in an unlawful differential treatment or impact that disfavors an individual or group of individuals on the basis of their disability.
- **Kentucky** [SB 4](#) (2025) designates The Commonwealth Office of Technology as the lead entity responsible for overseeing AI governance, including the establishment of an Artificial Intelligence Governance Committee tasked with developing policy standards and technology protocols to protect data privacy and mitigate risks associated with AI applications. Key provisions include the requirement for transparency in AI decision-making processes, where entities must disclose the use of AI and the extent of human oversight. Additionally, high-risk AI systems must adhere to risk management policies that identify and mitigate potential biases. The Commonwealth Office of Technology is also responsible for educating employees about AI's benefits and risks, as well as submitting annual reports detailing AI usage and security breaches within state government.
- **Maine's** [HB 1204](#) (2018) establishes the Commission on Autonomous Vehicles, which includes a representative from the Office of Aging and Disability Services within the Department of Health and Human Services, appointed by the Commissioner of Health and Human Services.

## Expand Accessible Transportation Options

- In **Alabama**, [SB 85](#) (2018) requires the Public Transportation Trust Fund to conduct a needs assessment every five years to identify the public transportation needs of various populations, including people with disabilities. The Trust Fund Advisory Council is also required to have a disability rights advocate as a member.
- In **Colorado**, [SB 17-011](#) (2017) creates a technical demonstration forum to study solutions to improve transportation access for people with disabilities, and documents how advanced technologies can improve transportation access, related to cross-disability services.
- **Idaho** uses two statewide coordinating council groups to advise the state's public transportation efforts. The [Idaho Interagency Working Group](#) comprises the state Transportation Department and other executive branch agency representatives, with the responsibility to "advise and assist the department in analyzing public transportation needs, identifying areas for coordination, and developing strategies for eliminating procedural and regulatory barriers to coordination at the state level." The [Idaho Public Transportation Advisory Council](#) comprises representatives from wide-ranging stakeholder groups.
- **Florida** [SB 1380](#) (2024) moved the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD) to the Department of Transportation. This measure also requires special transportation service providers to provide training to each driver that transports people with disabilities that meets the requirements established by the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. In 1989, Florida established the CTD and dedicated transportation funding through the CTD-administered Transportation Disadvantaged Trust Fund. Florida's coordinated transportation policies and programs have been recognized by the U.S. Departments of Transportation and Health and Human Services as a best practice model, and a 2008 Florida State University study suggested the state [received an 835 percent average return-on-investment](#) for funds invested into transportation programs for disadvantaged populations.
- **Maryland** [HB 1481](#) (2025) established the Adapted Vehicle Access Pilot Program to provide adapted vehicles to individuals who require a wheelchair for mobility. The program, administered by the Department of Disabilities, will take effect on October 1, 2025, and will last for five years, concluding on September 30, 2030, unless extended by the General Assembly. This initiative targets eligible licensed drivers who need a wheelchair and do not qualify for other existing vehicle access programs. By focusing on this specific population, the program aims to enhance mobility and independence for individuals with disabilities.
- **New Jersey** [SB2517](#) (2020), also known as the Paratransit Improvement Act, establishes a program to adopt paratransit best practices, requires greater coordination among paratransit service providers, and establishes regional paratransit coordinating councils. The coordinating councils are also required to establish a system to exchange information between paratransit providers and eventually develop open platform standards and share budget information.
- **Washington** [SB 5742](#) (2023) established a paratransit and special needs grant program to sustain and expand transit service to people with disabilities.

- **Wisconsin SB 398** (2024) creates a nonrefundable income tax credit for the costs of transportation services paid by a person considered blind for federal income tax purposes for certain transportation between the person's residence and place of employment. The services eligible for this credit must be provided by mass transit, paratransit, taxicab, or a transportation network company. The credit is equal to 50 percent of the costs of those transportation services paid during a taxable year and is limited to a maximum credit of \$1,500 per taxable year.

## ***Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment***

---

Entrepreneurship and self-employment can provide a promising pathway to employment and economic self-sufficiency. Research suggests there are numerous benefits to self-employment, including greater customization of job responsibilities and higher wages. In addition, self-employment may offer increased financial independence, opportunities to achieve career goals, and greater contributions to the state and local economy, including job creation and tax revenues. State and local governments can enact policies that encourage the development of disability-owned businesses, including disabled veteran-owned businesses. States can:

- ✓ **Formalize entrepreneurship and self-employment as viable strategies** for individuals with disabilities, including through the establishment of training and career development programs.
- ✓ **Promote opportunities and set goals and priorities for disability-owned businesses** to contract with the state for goods and services.
- ✓ **Provide efficient and expedited certification processes** for businesses contracting with state government.
- ✓ **Offer incentives and technical assistance** to support entrepreneurs and start-up efforts.

### **Formalize Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment as Viable Strategies**

- **Illinois Statute 20 Sec. 605-503** establishes small-business entrepreneurship assistance centers to train individuals, including those with disabilities, in the principles and practice of entrepreneurship to prepare them for self-employment opportunities.
- **Texas SB 464** (2023) establishes an Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Day to recognize entrepreneurship as a career path for all people with disabilities.

### **Offer Incentives and Technical Assistance**

- **Maryland SB 194** (2024) authorizes the Pricing and Selection Committee for Preferred Providers to establish procedures to govern procurement from community service providers and disability-owned businesses; maintain a current list of community service providers and disability-owned businesses; and report on the total number of full-time equivalents for individuals with disabilities who contributed to the work of the contracts.
- The **Abilities Fund** is focused on advancing entrepreneurial opportunities for Americans with disabilities. It provides training and assistance to both individuals with disabilities and the organizations that support them. By connecting individuals to lending programs that are best suited to their needs, budding entrepreneurs can obtain the funding they need to launch and grow a small business.

## Promote Opportunities and Set Goals and Priorities for Disability-Owned Businesses

- In **Alaska**, the [Alaskans with Disabilities Preference](#) provides a 10% contract bid preference when responding to a request for bids from the State of Alaska. This preference applies to the price in the bid or proposal if the qualified Alaska bidder or offeror is a business owner with a disability.
- **Kentucky** [HB 161](#) (2017) requires executive branch agencies to promote and publicize opportunities for service-disabled veteran-owned businesses to contract for goods and services. Agencies must also actively engage and counsel veterans' organizations on contract opportunities.
- **Virginia** [HB 1404](#) (2024) establishes the Small Business Procurement Enhancement Program, aiming for a statewide goal of achieving 42% of certified small business utilization, including disabled veteran-owned businesses, in all discretionary spending by executive branch agencies and covered institutions through procurement orders, prime contracts, and subcontracts.

## Provide Efficient and Expedited Certification Processes

- **Massachusetts** and **Pennsylvania** use the Disability:IN certification process and requirements to certify disability-owned businesses, including service-disabled veteran owned businesses.

## Interagency Coordination and Collaboration

States have many programs and services available to support individuals with disabilities in employment. However, these programs often operate in silos, working toward similar goals but with limited alignment or coordination. In addition, they often rely on funding streams with varying goals, priorities, and outcome expectations. A modern workforce system must be unified, navigable, and built around the needs of its users. Solving these challenges takes interagency collaboration and coordination. In some cases, the “blending, braiding, and sequencing” of services pools dollars from different programs and funding sources, allowing flexibility in service structure and delivery. States can implement policies that facilitate workforce system coordination and collaboration to optimize resources and service delivery and help individuals with disabilities achieve meaningful employment. States can:

- ✓ **Establish an interagency coordinating body** to improve coordination and collaboration among state agencies providing employment and wraparound services for individuals with disabilities. Include representatives from various sectors, including education, workforce development, transportation, service providers, and community organizations, among others. Provide the council with dedicated funding, staffing, and accountability mechanisms, including reporting to state leadership.
- ✓ **Improve data collection and reporting mechanisms** to gather program performance data (e.g., compliance rates, incentive utilization rates, procurement contract amounts) and support policy decision-making.
- ✓ **Integrate systems to enhance collaboration** among agencies providing employment, training, and other supports to individuals with disabilities, including establishing interagency agreements.

- ✓ **Use blending, braiding, and sequencing of funds** within and among agencies to maximize the efficient and effective use of program funds intended to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

### Establish an Interagency Coordinating Body

- **Illinois** [HB 655](#) (2009) created the Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities (EEOPD) Task Force to analyze programs and policies of the State to determine what modifications may be necessary to remove barriers to employment for persons with disabilities. EEOPD provides reports to the Governor's office and legislative leadership.
- The **New York** [Office of the Chief Disability Officer](#) (CDO) advocates on behalf of people with disabilities to represent the issues people with disabilities face. The CDO works to break down silos between state agencies that provide services to people with disabilities, pushes for progress on state-wide accessibility issues, provides a disability perspective on policy proposals, legislation, state agency operations, and diligently connects with communities and advocates on a wide spectrum of disability issues.

### Improve Data Collection and Reporting Mechanisms

- The **Alaska** Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education conducted a [survey of state workers in 2011 and 2022](#) in order to continue to monitor the representation of employees with disabilities in Alaska state government and solicit recommendations for improvement. Survey findings revealed important information on the state's efforts related to increasing the employment of persons with disabilities, including the fact that they are, in fact, appropriately represented in the state's workforce. Recommendations offered by the council include increasing training on the ADA for managers and supervisors, increasing flexibility through variable work schedules and job-sharing opportunities, improving workplace accessibility, developing targeted recruitment and retention programs for individuals with disabilities and offering health and wellness benefits and programs. In addition, in 2019, **Alaska** completed a new survey of employers regarding the employment of people with disabilities: [Alaskan Employer Perspectives on Hiring Individuals with Disabilities Summary Report 2019](#).
- **Florida** enacted [HB 7003](#) (2016), which modified the state's equal employment policy to provide enhanced executive branch agency employment opportunities for individuals who have a disability. The legislation provides for the compilation of data regarding hiring practices of individuals with disabilities and makes such data available on its website.
- The **Illinois** departments of Human Rights, Human Services and Central Management Services and the Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities and other state agencies conduct an [ongoing online work disability survey](#). The survey gives employees with disabilities an opportunity to self-identify and determine if emergency evacuation assistance may be necessary.
- **Kansas** Governor Parkinson signed [Executive Order No. 10-10](#) (2010), requiring the collection of baseline data on people with disabilities followed by annual reporting on the numbers of people employed and their fiscal impact on the state.

- In **Maine**, a [2006 Executive Order](#) signed by Governor Baldacci requires a survey of employees to better understand the prevalence of employees with disabilities in state government.
- In order to increase state government employment of people with disabilities, **Minnesota** Governor Dayton's [Executive Order No. 14-14](#) (2014) requires state agencies to submit a plan with: a policy statement; assignment of responsibilities, including a workforce analysis, goals, objectives and timetable for completion; and measures to facilitate implementation and development of internal audit and reporting systems. Technical assistance is provided to each state agency to develop the plans.
- Governor Parsons of **Missouri** issued [Executive Order No. 19-16](#) (2019) directing the Office of Administration, on an annual basis, collect data based on voluntary self-disclosure, report initial baseline numbers of state employees with disabilities and report and evaluate the state's progress in increasing the percentage of employees with disabilities in the state workforce.
- Governor Walz of **Minnesota** issued Executive Order No. [19-15: Providing for Increased State Employment of Individuals with Disabilities](#) (2019) that orders best efforts to achieve a goal of 10 percent of employment of people with disabilities in the executive branch and implement a system for reporting quarterly to the governor on the progress of hiring individuals with disabilities for the executive branch. The Executive Order also directed the applicable state agency to compile and post on its website enterprise-wide statistics on the hiring and turnover of individuals with disabilities.
- **New York** enacted [Sb 6276](#) (2021), which requires the president of the civil service commission to conduct a study on the employment of persons and veterans with disabilities by the state and make recommendations as to whether the state needs to hire more persons and veterans with disabilities to fill the positions created by sections 55-b and 55-c of the civil service law.
- Governor DeWine of **Ohio** issued [Executive Order No. 2019-03D: Establishing Ohio as a Disability Inclusion State and Model Employer of Individuals with Disabilities](#) (2019) directing all state agencies to collect and evaluate self-disclosed data through the state personnel system to be used to measure progress in hiring people with disabilities. This data will be used to develop a strategic plan.
- The **Pennsylvania** [Employment First legislation](#) (2018) directs the Office of Administration (OA) to develop a framework for individuals to self-report a disability.
- **Texas** enacted [SB 2027](#) (2017), which requires a study to evaluate, by region, training and employment opportunities in the state for individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- Governor Northam of **Virginia** issued [Executive Order No. 47](#) (2020) requiring reporting to the Governor on the progress of this order and the steps taken to ensure community integration, improve website accessibility and advance employment of Virginians with disabilities.
- **Virginia** also enacted [HB 1098](#) (2020), which requires state agencies to prepare a plan to increase employment opportunities at the agencies for individuals with disabilities. The Secretary shall establish guidelines regarding the development and content of state agency plans and establish a reporting system for tracking and reporting the progress of state agencies toward meeting the employment goals of the Commonwealth established

by this section. In addition, the Secretary, in collaboration with the Department of Human Resource Management, shall develop an annual report on the number of individuals with disabilities directly employed by the state agencies. The information shall be included in the annual demographic report of the Department of Human Resource Management. Further, the Secretary shall report on the progress of state agencies toward meeting the employment goals of the Commonwealth to the Governor and the Chairmen of the House Committee on Appropriations and the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations by September 1 of each year.

- **Washington** enacted [HB 1636](#) (2015), requiring all state agencies with 100 or more employees to provide an annual report to the legislature with data related to the percentage of individuals with disabilities in the agency's workforce, including the number of new hires employed from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation services or the Department of Services for the Blind. The legislation also requires that each covered agency report to the legislature regarding opportunities for internships that would lead to permanent placement in entry-level positions.

### **Integrate Systems to Enhance Collaboration**

- **Florida** [State Unified Plan](#): "Collaborations such as High School/High Tech (HSHT), Project SEARCH, and postsecondary education programs engage youth in experiences that blend academics with career and technical education. They also provide hands-on career exploration and preparation activities where learned skills, attitudes, and behaviors can be applied" (p. 19).
- In **Texas**, [Student HireAbility Navigators](#) coordinate with Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS), Workforce Boards, contractor staff, and community stakeholders to create innovative and successful strategies that increase the workforce services and facilitate access to Pre-Employment Transition Services for students with disabilities.
- **Washington's** Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council created an [MOU](#) among core WIOA partners, local elected officials, and community organizations to establish a unified regional workforce system and shared strategy for coordinated service delivery across AJCs. The document outlines a vision for an integrated, customer-centered system where workforce, education, and human service programs operate collaboratively rather than in silos, using common processes for intake, co-enrollment, data sharing, referral, and business engagement. It defines each partner's responsibilities; details the structure of comprehensive, affiliate, and specialized service sites; and explains how business services, career services, training, youth services, and specialized supports will be delivered through a coordinated model. The MOU also establishes expectations for shared infrastructure funding, performance accountability, functional team operations, and cross-training of staff, with the overarching goal of reducing duplication, increasing access to services, strengthening employer engagement, and improving employment outcomes for job seekers across the region, including individuals with barriers to employment.

### **Use Blending, Braiding, and Sequencing of Funds**

- **Alabama** established the [Governor's Office of Education and Workforce Transformation \(GOEWT\)](#) in 2018 to align the state's education, workforce, and human services systems

under the Office of the Governor. The goals of the office are to 1.) braid Alabama's federal education and workforce development funding streams to support an education-to-workforce pipeline; 2.) create and manage the Alabama Terminal for Linking and Analyzing Statistics (ATLAS) on Career Pathways as Alabama's state longitudinal database system; and 3.) create the Alabama Office of Apprenticeship.

- **California** [State Unified Plan](#): "In California, resources will be braided and services integrated and aligned through the creation of 'value-added' partnerships at the state, regional and local levels" (p. 70 - 71). "Recommended relevant best practices may include...braiding resources from WIOA Title I Adult and Youth programs with WIOA Title II programs to provide supportive services to those attending basic education and skills programs so as to facilitate both course and program completion" (p. 104).
- **Iowa** [State Unified Plan](#): Iowa operates under an Integrated Service Delivery model to ensure all customers are afforded a comprehensive blend of services designed to jointly place them into full-time, non-seasonal employment or upgraded agricultural employment. Efforts to blend and braid funds, as well as establish uniform payment systems among state partners continue to be viewed as Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) priority areas going forward.
- The **Maryland** Department of Labor; Department of Education, Division of Rehabilitation Services; Department of Human Services; Governor's Workforce Development Board; and Department of Housing and Community Development created [comprehensive cross agency policy guidance](#) on creating and implementing WIOA MOUs) and Resource Sharing Agreements (RSAs) to promote interagency collaboration and the leveraging of resources between programs.