CSAVR National News Brief

July 23, 2023

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

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NATIONAL NEWS

Some good news in terms of employment for individuals with disabilities. According to a recent NBC digital news story and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of employed individuals with disabilities climbed by approximately 175,000 in June to 7.6 million, which is higher than at any point since June 2008, the earliest year for which data is available. To learn more, go to: Wile, Rob. "**Employment Among People with Disabilities Hits Post-Pandemic High** [links.news.mathematica-mpr.com]." NBC News.

Many are traveling this summer despite the intense heat and crazy weather. Recreation.gov [click.icptrack.com] is a centralized travel planning platform and reservation system for the recreational facilities managed across 13 federal agencies. The site offers tools, tips, and information to discover parks and historic and cultural sites across the US. As part of its Accessibility Initiative [click.icptrack.com], visitors can search for accessible camping and park facilities. Visitors can also review and comment on the accessible features of the sites they visit.

In response to the deluge of SSI overpayments, Cornell University has created a tool for work incentive planners to help them handle work-related overpayments. The tool can be found at https://ssi.disabilitybenefitsatwork.org/tool/8/nuts-and-bolts [nenaticket.org] It includes quick analysis steps and links to the actual SSA forms that they need, helpful tips, and information about what to expect after filing an overpayment-related request with SSA. **Read More...** [nenaticket.org]

Some interesting tidbits:

- The average wage for US teens in June was $15.74 an hour, an increase of 20% from two summers ago. *Semafor*

- The number of unemployed African Americans has increased by 267,000 since April, meaning they account for close to 90% of the 300,000 increase in overall joblessness during that period. Black unemployment rose to 6% in June. *Bloomberg (*Not good*!)*

- Congratulations to our friends at Mathematica on being named a 2023 Best Place to Work for people with disabilities. To learn more, go to Mathematica has been recognized as a 2023 Best Place to Work for People with Disabilities. [links.news.mathematica-mpr.com]

- Just for fun, chewing gum sales have fallen 32% since 2018. *The Atlantic.*

DIRECTOR NEWS

Lea Dias has been named as the Hawaii Combined Director.

Brian Dennis has been named interim Director of Iowa General.

Welcome and congratulations to both of you. Please let us know how we at CSAVR can help.

TAC NEWS

VRTAC-QM Webinar-Period of Performance, Live! August 1, 2023, 2pm to 4pm EST

Effective fiscal management of program funds is centered around a firm understanding and application of the period of performance requirements. In this session, we will explore expectations and considerations for building and maintaining essential practices related to tracking, reporting, and liquidating obligations.

- How to manage obligations

- Maximize federal dollars with carryover

- Tracking, reporting, and liquidation

- A spending strategy is a must

- Technology considerations to effectively manage

- Understand it's a timing thing

RSA UPDATE

On July 12th, RSA issued TAC-23-03: Maximizing Services and the Use of Funds to Support Quality Employment Outcomes for Individuals with Disabilities through the Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Programs [lnks.gd]. If you are looking for ways to increase your case service spending, RSA shares their ideas on how to do it in this TAC.

RSA has announced details for the FFY 2023 reallotment process using the Grant Reallotment Form (RSA-692) which is available through their Management Information System (RSAMIS) website (https://rsa.ed.gov [rsa.ed.gov]) from *Friday, July 14, 2023,* through Tuesday*, August 15, 2023.* The following Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) formula award programs are subject to reallotment:

- State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services (Assistance Listing Number (ALN) 84.126A);

- Client Assistance Program (CAP) (ALN 84.161A);

- Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) (ALN 84.177B);

- State Supported Employment Services (Supported Employment) (ALN 84.187A);

- State Supported Employment Services (Supported Employment) (ALN 84.187B); and,

- Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights (PAIR) (ALN 84.240A).

You should use the RSA-692 to inform the RSA of the amount of FFY 2023 grant award funds to be relinquished and/or to request additional funds. Awardee staff submitting the reallotment data must have an RSAMIS account and permission to use the RSA-692 form.

As you are aware, the Hill for the past few years and an increasing number of others have been interested in the amount of federal dollars our program has been returning unmatched. We want to get ahead of the Hill in answering the question that will surely come, which is *Why are these dollars continuing to go unmatched?* **Please help us be prepared and share with CSAVR the amounts your agencies project you will relinquish or request in additional funds and the WHY especially behind amounts being relinquished. Thanks for your help.**

RSA has rolled-out the [Payback Information Management System (PIMS) [pdp.ed.gov]](#) Job Board. The PIMS Job Board is available to State VR agencies to post open positions and serves as a resource for RSA scholars in their search for qualifying employment. Postings found on the Job Board undergo a review by RSA, and when approved, signal to RSA scholars that the positions are eligible to fulfill a scholar's payback of scholarship funds received through the [Rehabilitation Long-Term Training [rsa.ed.gov]](#) program. RSA scholars can access the PIMS Job Board by logging on to their [PIMS [pdp.ed.gov]](#) account. State VR agencies may submit open positions by submitting [this form [pdp.ed.gov]](#).

NATIONAL DATA AVAIALABLE ON ABLE

As of March 2023, there are 144,068 ABLE accounts, with $1.39 billion in the accounts, for an average balance of $9,715 per account. National ABLE Account Data provided by the National Association of State Treasurers (NAST) is released quarterly on their website.

2023 CSAVR SPRING CONFERENCE

Presentations and materials from the conference are now posted under the Resources tab on the CSAVR website.

The team is already starting to work on the Fall Conference which will be in Savannah, Georgia from October 28th to November 1st. Mark it on your calendars!

NENA HAPPENINGS

NENA has elected the following to their Board of Directors:

Amy Wallish

Angelina Bush

Christa Nivens

Linda Patino

Rachel Hoffman

Conference Information:

Conference Dates: **September 12-14, 2023**

Deadline for Conference Registration: **July 31, 2023**

Deadline to reserve your room: **August 11, 2023**

SSA UPDATE

SSA announced a new resource to assist Employment Networks (EN) in developing relationships with Ticketholders and supporting them through their journey to financial self-sufficiency. The new EN Guide for Working with Ticketholders provides specific tips and details about:
- Conducting a thorough intake discussion with a Ticketholder
- Creating and updating a detailed Individual Work Plan (IWP)
- Assigning and unassigning Tickets
- Preparing for IWP and Services and Supports Reviews

ENs can access the new guide here [nenaticket.org] and begin using this new resource. Contact ENOperations@yourtickettowork.ssa.gov with any questions or comments related to the new guide.

SSA has announced two upcoming learning events as part of "EN Essentials," a new series of supplemental trainings for both new and established Employment Networks (EN):

August 9, 2023: 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. ET

Developing and Maintaining Successful Individual Work Plans (Part 1)

Discuss how to complete an IWP using Ticketholder intake information to create goals and identify the services and supports the Ticketholder needs. This session will cover Ticket assignment and amending the IWP as the Ticketholder moves toward their employment goals.

September 20, 2023: 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. ET

Developing and Maintaining Successful Individual Work Plans (Part 2)

This session will cover Ticket assignment and additional compliance metrics for IWP completion, including the discussion summary and signatures required. The session will also stress the importance of ongoing communication and required documentation of services and supports the EN provides.

REPORTS, TRAINING, NEWSLETTERS AND CONFERENCE OPPORTUNITIES

NASWA's Workforce IT Support Center (Workforce ITSC), in conjunction with USDOL, announced the formation of the *Aligned Case Management (ACM) Institute*. Join them on Friday, July 28 (3:00 - 4:00 PM ET) for an informational webinar "Aligned Case Management: Advancing the Effort Together" to learn more about the ACM Institute and opportunity for states to participate. The ACM Institute aims to enhance service delivery and customer experience within the public workforce system through the creation of a replicable framework and an on-demand toolkit of resources, leveraging data and modern technology.

The [Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) on Community Living and Participation](click.icptrack.com) [click.icptrack.com] published the Summer 2023 issue of its journal [Frontline Initiative: Supporting Health and Wellness](click.icptrack.com) [click.icptrack.com] featureing direct support professionals (DSPs) supporting the health and wellness of people with disabilities. It includes practical tips and resources that may help DSPs better understand how to support people with disabilities with their ongoing physical and emotional health needs, from navigating health appointments to incorporating wellness activities into daily life.

Researchers from the [Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Home and Community-Based Services Outcomes Measurement (RTC-OM)](click.icptrack.com) [click.icptrack.com] (90RT5039) announced the release of [Improving the Quality of Outcome Measurement for Adults with Disabilities Receiving Community-Based Services](click.icptrack.com) [click.icptrack.com], a special issue of the journal Frontiers in Rehabilitation Sciences: Disability, Rehabilitation, and Inclusion focusing on different components and approaches to measuring and assessing the quality of services and life outcomes of adults with disabilities in the context of community-based services and support.

The [Civil Rights Division](click.icptrack.com) [click.icptrack.com] of the Department of Justice (DOJ) will host an event, [Addressing the Criminalization of People with Disabilities](click.icptrack.com) [click.icptrack.com], July 25th, 1 - 3 pm ET, in recognition of the 33rd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Presenters from various agencies and initiatives will focus on the rights of people with disabilities to avoid needless involvement with the criminal justice system. Registration is free and required to attend virtually or in person.

The Great Lakes ADA Regional Center [click.icptrack.com] (90DPAD0012) will host a webinar, ADA Anniversary Update [click.icptrack.com], July 25th, 2 - 3:30 pm ET. Presenters from the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and US Department of Justice will provide an update on their litigation, technical assistance, and enforcement efforts. Participants will have an opportunity to ask questions regarding issues in their own workplace or community. Registration is free and required. Continuing education credits are available upon request.

Temple University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Community Living and Participation of People with Serious Mental Illness (TU Collaborative) [click.icptrack.com] (90RTCP0001) seeks people with mental health conditions and type 2 diabetes to share their experience in living with both conditions. Participants will share their stories via a 15- to 20-minute phone interview. Those who are interested may schedule an interview time online [click.icptrack.com] or contact Kathy Arazawa at 215/204-5593 or kathy.arazawa@temple.edu.

The Southeast ADA Regional Center [click.icptrack.com] (90DPAD00005) released the latest episode of the ADA Live! Podcast, Celebrating the ADA! Learn about the ADA National Network (ADANN) and NIDILRR [click.icptrack.com]. This episode celebrates the 33rd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) with guest Shelley Reeves, the ADA National Network Program Coordinator and Section 21 Program Coordinator at NIDILRR [click.icptrack.com]. Ms. Reeves discussed NIDILRR's mission, projects, and programs that help each ADA Regional Center in the network serve and support communities of people with disabilities and other ADA stakeholders throughout the US.

On January 16-18, 2024, University of Wisconsin-Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute (SVRI) is holding its innovations expo providing a virtual forum for sharing innovative and creative solutions in vocational rehabilitation (VR) that are field-initiated (frontline), improve the consumer VR experience, and result in high-quality employment outcomes. For questions about submitting a proposal or assistance preparing the proposal, email: **svri.training@gmail.com**.

The NCRTM monthly newsletter Issue #80 is available. Featured are Disability Pride and ADA Celebrations, PIMS Job Board, CSAVR Materials, and More!

COVID THOUGHTS

From Director Greg Trapp, NM-B:

Coronavirus Long COVID link to mental health conditions prompts federal advisory By Rong-Gong Lin II Rong-Gong Lin II Los Angeles Times June 23, 2023 Federal health officials have identified a number of mental health conditions associated with long COVID, prompting them to issue an advisory to help doctors treat patients suffering from the syndrome. Conditions could include depression, anxiety, psychosis, obsessive-compulsive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. Other long COVID symptoms can include fatigue, trouble sleeping

and cognitive impairment, according to the advisory from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration a branch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It can be challenging to determine whether mental health illness is the result of long COVID or other factors.

Whatever the reason, however, "treating symptoms is vital to recovery," the advisory said. "This long COVID epidemic is not over. We're absolutely in the midst of it," said Dr. Will Pittman, associate director of the UCLA Health Long COVID Program. "Psychiatric symptoms are some of the most common symptoms that we see in long COVID. The advisory is partly an acknowledgment that many healthcare providers need more education on long COVID, which has been linked to numerous symptoms affecting virtually every part of the body. Even in the post-emergency phase of the pandemic, it can be hard for long-haul sufferers to get the care they need, experts say.

Although long COVID clinics do exist, their capacity is limited. "We know that people living with long COVID need help today, and providers need help understanding what long COVID is and how to treat it," Dr. Rachel Levine, assistant secretary for health for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, said in a statement. Because long COVID can be debilitating, the advisory suggests healthcare providers approach patients as having undergone trauma. Suggested interventions include individual and group psychotherapy, peer support groups, physical therapy, neuro-rehabilitation, medication to treat anxiety and depression, speech therapy for people whose language skills were affected and treatment for people suffering from substance abuse.

The advisory also urged healthcare providers to listen, and not dismiss, their patient's stories, manage symptoms while sharing the uncertainty of prognosis and "provide hope while helping set realistic recovery goals. Anyone with worsening anxiety or depression, or has thoughts of self-harm, warrant immediate action and referral to a mental health specialist. Pittman said he's seen patients who have long COVID but feel as though their other doctors haven't listened to them "they don't feel like they've been taken seriously. Other times, some primary care physicians are linking symptoms like anxiety or depression to a long COVID diagnosis but then referring the patient to a specialty clinic instead of treating those mental health challenges. "Primary care really needs to take the reins of treating this. And they absolutely can, and I think they do have tools at their disposal to treat this and to make patients better," Pittman said.

The advisory notes that healthcare providers who aren't familiar with the wide range of long COVID symptoms may misdiagnose patients. This can be another barrier to care, as patients may feel ashamed or discouraged from seeking treatment if a healthcare provider suggests symptoms are exaggerated or simply "in their head. The precise prevalence of long COVID is difficult to determine. But some scientists estimate that 10% of people who had a coronavirus infection develop long COVID. Among those hospitalized on account of COVID-19, researchers estimate 50% to 70% develop long COVID.

According to a report published in January in the journal Nature Reviews Microbiology, "Long COVID is associated with all ages and acute-phase disease severities, with the highest percentage of diagnoses between the ages of 36 and 50 years. Most long COVID cases, the report added, "are in non-hospitalized patients with a mild acute illness, as this population represents the majority of overall COVID-19 cases. Being unvaccinated increases the risk of long COVID. There's likely a complicated relationship between a coronavirus infection and mental health conditions, the advisory said. Those who already suffered from depression, anxiety, stress and loneliness before a coronavirus infection are at higher risk for long COVID, the advisory said. But it's also true that people without prior mental health conditions "are at higher risk for developing an initial onset of mental illness following COVID-19 compared to people who were not infected.

Officials identified nine mental health conditions and other symptoms associated with long COVID in the advisory. Authorities also detailed how often symptoms or conditions were reported:

- Fatigue: Reported by 32% of COVID-19 survivors 12 or more weeks after diagnosis.

- Brain fog/cognitive impairment: Reported by 22% of COVID-19 survivors 12 or more weeks after diagnosis. Even two years after infection, there's an increased risk of cognitive impairment for people who had COVID-19 compared with those with another respiratory illness.

- Anxiety: Symptoms reported in 35% of adults with long COVID six months after the onset of COVID-19 symptoms. Depression: Reported in 41% of adults with long COVID six months after onset of COVID-19 symptoms.

- Obsessive-compulsive disorder: Symptoms reported by 20% of adults one month after a hospital stay for COVID-19 infection. By comparison, about 2% of adults in the U.S. are diagnosed with OCD over their lifetime.

- Sleep disorders: Reported by 30% of adults with long COVID. Post-traumatic stress disorder: Diagnosis is reported in about 14% of adults with long COVID three months or more after a COVID-19 infection.

- Psychotic disorder: There's evidence of a greater risk for a psychotic disorder six months after a COVID-19 diagnosis compared with people with another type of respiratory infection. "While risk of anxiety and mood disorders returned to baseline one to two months after a COVID-19 diagnosis, risk of psychotic disorders remained elevated two years after follow-up, suggesting a different pathogenesis for this condition," the health advisory said.

- Initial onset of substance-use disorder: Scientists say those who were infected, but not hospitalized, with COVID-19 are more likely to be diagnosed with their first substance-

use disorder six months after their diagnosis compared with people who recover from the flu. "The symptoms of long COVID are greatly varied, can go for an extended period of time and sometimes keep people from their day-to-day activities all things that can contribute to mental health challenges," the L.A. County Department of Public Health said in a statement.

Long-haul sufferers who are women, Black, Latino and Native American are at higher risk for also developing a mental health condition. Those who were hospitalized for their acute COVID-19 illness had a more severe initial illness or a longer duration of symptoms.

One reason why Black, Latino and Native American people are at higher risk is because those groups have higher rates of hospitalization for COVID-19 compared with white residents, a disparity officials partly attribute to increased risk of chronic disease and less access to healthcare resources among those populations. "Inadequate access to safe housing, healthy food, transportation and healthcare can increase chronic stress among individuals in racial and ethnic minority groups, people with disabilities and people identifying as LGBTQI+. This contributes to negative impacts on their mental health and poor COVID-19 outcomes," the advisory said.

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