



ADVANCING  
DISABILITY INCLUSION  
& WORKFORCE  
INNOVATION

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

# CSAVR National News Brief

**November 19, 2023**

CSAVR *National News Brief* is a regular series covering legislative activity, media stories, research initiatives, webinars, reports, conferences, and national advocacy activities of interest to member state VR agencies. CSAVR staff and wish all a very Happy Thanksgiving. Our offices will be closed on November 23 and 24 due to the holiday. There will not be any CSAVR newsletters sent this coming week, and we will resume them the following week.

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## **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- 1. NATIONAL NEWS**
- 2. CSAVR YES/LMS WEBINARS**
- 3. DIRECTOR NEWS**
- 4. CSAVR HAPPENINGS**
- 5. 2023 CSAVR FALL CONFERENCE**
- 6. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION RETURN ON INVESTMENT PROJECT**
- 7. RSA & OTHER FEDERAL NEWS**
- 8. RECRUITMENT & RETENTION LUNCH & LEARN WEBINAR**
- 9. TAC NEWS**
- 10. ABLE NEWS**
- 11. REPORTS, TRAININGS, NEWSLETTERS, AND CONFERENCE OPPORTUNITIES**
- 12. COVID 19 UPDATE**
- 13. RECENT ARTICLES**

## **NATIONAL NEWS**

This November, we commemorate National Native American Heritage Month by honoring the unique and diverse history of American Indians and Alaskan Natives. [Celebrating National Native American Heritage Month \(govdelivery.com\) \[content.govdelivery.com\]](https://www.govdelivery.com/content/govdelivery.com). [If you were at the fall conference, hopefully you had an opportunity to stop by the](#) American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center (AIVRTTAC) table. AIVRTTAC is funded by RSA. The purpose of the AIVRTTAC is to provide training and technical assistance (TA) to governing bodies of Indian tribes that administer an American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services (AIVRS) project.

November is also National Family Caregivers Month (NFCM), a time to recognize and honor family caregivers across the country. The national observance is led by [Caregiver Action Network \(CAN\) \[caregiveraction.org\]](https://caregiveraction.org), a nonprofit that provides free education, peer support, and resources to family caregivers. Read [President Biden's NFCM proclamation \[caregiveraction.org\]](#).

Recently, more than 1,300 public servants, Medicaid advocates, and program members met at the 2023 annual National Association of Medicaid Directors (NAMD) conference in Washington, DC. Although Medicaid eligibility and enrollment challenges during the COVID pandemic unwinding period were a main focus, this year's conference also held up as exemplars the wide range of state efforts to improve community supports for individuals with disabilities, Medicaid's role in behavioral health crisis management and recovery, and collective goals to improve maternal and infant health nationwide.

Some common threads throughout the conference sessions included:

- The increasing complexity of the data systems and processes states use to manage the web of social programs jointly funded by federal and state agencies.
- The increasing dependence public servants have on data collection and reporting systems.
- The novel opportunities for program improvement public servants are beginning to realize with those systems.

Last month, the U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA) announced that for 2024, more than 71 million Americans who receive monthly Social Security benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments will see a 3.2% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA). The COLA takes effect with SSI payments paid on December 29, 2023, and Social Security benefits paid in January 2024. The SSA will start notifying people by mail about their new benefit amount in early December. For more information, please visit [www.ssa.gov/news/press/releases](http://www.ssa.gov/news/press/releases). [[nenaticket.org](http://nenaticket.org)]

## **CSAVR YES/LMS WEBINARS**

Based on input from the field, CSAVR has partnered with yesLMS to offer three free webinars with the first one being this past week. For the first webinar on Case documentation, we had nearly 700 folks online – which is a real indication we are addressing an unmet need. These webinars are recorded, will be captioned with ASL interpreters, and housed on the CSAVR yesLMS page for others to view and receive CRC credits.

The remaining webinars are:

### **WEBINAR 2:**

#### **Case Management | December 12, 2023, 3:00-4:30 ET**

A VR Counselor's case management skills directly impact clients' ability to successfully achieve their employment and career goals. Effective case management requires competence in a broad range of skills, including counseling and guidance, communication, problem-solving, case documentation, and time management. Participants in this session will learn about catalysts for case progression, identify strategies for efficient time and resource management, explore communication skills that enhance case management, understand the importance of case documentation, and examine critical thinking skills for problem-solving.

**Presenters:** Steve Upchurch, Tammi Williams, Gretchen Ykema ([bios.yeslms.us10.list-manage.com](http://bios.yeslms.us10.list-manage.com))

### **WEBINAR 3:**

#### **Become an Adult Ally: Empowering Youth in Vocational Rehabilitation | January 23, 2024, 3:00-4:30 ET**

This interactive session focuses on what State VR agencies can do to foster youth inclusion by demonstrating that voices are heard and are valued as equal partners with VR professionals. Recommendations that are grounded in the stages of change model will provide strategies and practices to engage with youth.

- Explore the inherent power differential that exists within the Youth-Transition Relationship
- Explain why shifting the power differential in the transition-relationship to being an “adult ally” empowers youth to be active leaders in their own career development
- Provide strategies to support continuous engagement of students and youth

**Presenters:** DJ Ralston, M.A., Linda Hedenblad, Sandra Miller, M.S., and John Walsh from George Washington University

### **DIRECTOR NEWS**

As of November 17, 2023, Brent McNeal resigned as Director of Florida General to accept an offer to serve as WIOA Attorney, advising the Florida Department of Commerce and CareerSource Florida on workforce-related matters. Victoria Gaitanis will serve as Acting Director.

### **CSAVR HAPPENINGS**

Don't forget to join us for the December Monthly Membership Call at 2 pm ET on Wednesday, December 6<sup>th</sup> for a presentation on the Progressive Employment Collaborative. And, be looking for GREAT NEWS about the addition of a new team member to the CSAVR staff!!! Yeah!

### **2023 CSAVR FALL CONFERENCE**

The 2023 fall CSAVR conference and related forums are in the book, and we are already turning our attention to planning for the 2024 spring conference in Bethesda, Maryland April 6-10, 2024. Hope you have those dates already marked on your 2024 calendar.

For those of you who attended the conference, hope you will take time if you have not already completed the evaluation to do so. The link will be open through close of business on November 30<sup>th</sup>. Your feedback is much appreciated.

There were a lot of moving parts to our fall conference with not only general sessions and the various concurrent sessions. Want to thank all our excellent presenters and attendees for your patience and understanding with the AV glitches and other inconveniences that cropped up from time to time. Thanks also to all our partners, yesLMS, the TACs, and GWU for your participation and assistance.

I don't know if it was Savannah trying to live up to its reputation as the most haunted city in America and sorry for the sprinkler and hotel challenges that arose. Appreciated everybody staying with us and hanging in there. Again, very sorry for the inconvenience.

Last and certainly not least, I want to thank our Officers for their leadership and all the work that the CSAVR staff did. Without this, there would not have been a conference.

Again, thanks to all. Hope you enjoyed the conference and forums and got to have some fun too!

### **VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION RETURN ON INVESTMENT PROJECT**

Please be on the lookout for a survey from the Vocational Rehabilitation Return on Investment project. The North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Division and Services for the Blind are working with the project to develop and implement a simplified version of the VR ROI model as part of a National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) grant to better tell the VR story. The project is working to tailor a VR-ROI model to the information needs of VR agencies and is sending a survey to agency Directors to learn more about agency capacity to estimate and interpret a simplified VR ROI model.

The survey seeks to identify whether agencies have the in-house staff, data, software, and statistical knowledge to carry out detailed data management and analysis projects. The project staff also hope to determine an agency's ability to contract out such analyses. The information from the survey will be used to create a simplified ROI model that can be used by VR agencies across the country. The aim is to put VR agencies in a better position to make timely decisions for enhancing services while providing information for informed decision making for counselors and their consumers with disabilities. It will also provide VR administrators with information on service effectiveness and program value that can be shared

with policy makers and other stakeholders. Survey results will be shared with all VR agencies to support their efforts to provide quality services.

## **RSA & OTHER FEDERAL NEWS**

Congratulations to Douglas Zhu on his appointment as the RSA Training Programs Unit Chief. We look forward to working with him in this new capacity.

On October 30, 2023, RSA published policy guidance titled, [\*Promoting Meaningful and Sustained Engagement of Individuals with Disabilities in the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program\*](#) [\[rsa.ed.gov\]](https://rsa.ed.gov) (RSA-TAC-24-01). The TAC provides policy guidance on engaging individuals in the VR process and maintaining that engagement to assist customers to achieve CIE. There is a lot to consider and CSAVR has reached out to TAC QM to possibly help with the interpretation of this important TAC.

With the issuance of the FFY 2024 VR grant awards, RSA added the following three reports, required under [2 C.F.R. § 200.330 \[Inks.gd\]](#), to the Grant Award Notification (GAN) attachment titled Performance and Financial Reports (RSA-VR-3):

- Real Property Status Report (Cover Page) [\(SF-429\) \[Inks.gd\]](#);
- Real Property Status Report Attachment A (General Reporting) [\(SF-429A\) \[Inks.gd\]](#); and
- Real Property Status Report Attachment C (Disposition or Encumbrance Request) [\(SF-429C\) \[Inks.gd\]](#).

The GAN instructs awardees to use and submit the Real Property Status Report forms, beginning with the FFY 2024 grant awards, if VR program funds, program income, or non-Federal match funds were used to acquire, construct, or improve real property, thereby, giving the U.S. Department of Education a monetary Federal interest in that property. RSA will be providing training on how to complete and submit the property forms. Contact the [Financial Management Specialist \[Inks.gd\]](#) assigned to your State or email any questions to [RSAFiscal@ed.gov](mailto:RSAFiscal@ed.gov)

**Citation:** [2 C.F.R. § 200.330 \[Inks.gd\]](#) - Reporting on real property.

## **New RSA 2023 Discretionary Grant Awards**

In Fiscal Year 2023, RSA provided nearly \$200 million in new discretionary grants to fund programs to help maximize employment, independence & integration of individuals with disabilities into the community & the competitive labor market. Read more in [OSERS Blog \[Inks.gd\]](#).

## **New OSEP 2023 Discretionary Grant Awards**

In Fiscal Year 2023, OSEP provided more than \$110 million in new discretionary grants to fund programs that help educate children and youth with disabilities and improve results for children with disabilities ages birth through 21. Read more in [OSERS Blog \[Inks.gd\]](#).

## **Student-Led Decision-Making in Schools**

Secondary transition is more successful when students take part in the planning process. The 2nd blog post from OSERS in the Expect, Engage, Empower: Successful Transitions for All! series addresses the benefits of student-led decision making in schools. Read more in [OSERS Blog \[Inks.gd\]](#).

## **Protactile Language: Creating Equity for DeafBlind Individuals**

Western Oregon University's Protactile Language Interpreting (PLI) National Education Program. The program trains sign language interpreters working with DeafBlind consumers who are using a new language, Protactile, in a variety of settings such as vocational rehabilitation, post-secondary education, professional and business-related events, and medical settings. Read more in [OSERS Blog \[Inks.gd\]](#).

## **RECRUITMENT & RETENTION LUNCH & LEARN WEBINAR**

On November 8<sup>th</sup> the abovementioned webinar was held for OSERS, RSA, and long-term training program staff. RSA, NCRTM, and CSAVR via the Operations and Personnel Committee sponsored the event which included a presentation by Dr. James Herbert from Penn St. of the initial findings of his recruitment and retention study. There were approximately 70 individuals attending the event.

Thanks to Dr. Herbert and Carol Pankow of TAC QM who served as the moderator and the following panelists:

### **Texas**

Laura York, Program Specialist for Special Projects, Texas Workforce Commission, Vocational Rehabilitation Division

Dr. Linda Holloway, Ph.D., Department of Rehabilitation and Health Services, Professor Emerita, University of North Texas

## **Georgia**

Donald Lewis, CRC, Career Center Director and RSA Project Manager, Thomas University

Jeff Allen, MS CRC, Director of Policy and Compliance, Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency

Brigham Geurts, MMHC, MRC, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor / Recent Program Graduate of Thomas University, VR Counselor at Utah State Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

## **Mississippi**

Frank L. Giles Ph.D., CRC, Professor & Director Rehabilitation Counseling Program, Jackson State University

Rosie Gibson, Director at Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services

A special thanks to Heather Servais of NCRTM and John Connelly of CSAVR for all their work and leadership in putting this event together.

## **TAC NEWS**

### **VRTAC-QM Manager Minute: Career Advancement DIF - How MRC is Turning VR on its Head!**

[LISTEN HERE \[managerminutevrtac-qw.libsyn.com\]](http://managerminutevrtac-qw.libsyn.com) - In the studio today are Joan Phillips, Assistant Commissioner at the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, and Michelle Banks, DIF Strategic Director for MRC.

Find out how MRC is turning VR on its head. What would they do differently in the first year, and what results would they see after year 2? Learn about the success of the job certification program, and how they are meeting the "NextGen-ers" where they are at.



Hear how Joan and Michelle encourage others to take on a DIF Grant to help bring more innovation and creative ideas to VR.

Learn more about the <https://www.mass.gov/nextgen-careers> [mass.gov]

The VRTAC-QE is seeking proposals, for both concurrent and poster presentations, for its conference being held in Madison, WI, from Wednesday, May 22, through Thursday, May 23, 2024. The conference theme is, "Partnerships Across Rehabilitation Research, Employment, and Empowerment." **Proposal submission deadline: Friday, December 15, 2023 - 11:55 pm (PDT)** Notification on submissions will occur by: Monday, January 8, 2024 To submit a presentation, individuals can navigate to the following Qualtrics survey:

[https://uwmadison.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_72hRVUDzLFraDIA](https://uwmadison.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_72hRVUDzLFraDIA)  
[uwmadison.co1.qualtrics.com]

### **ABLE NEWS**

The standard ABLE account annual contribution limit is \$18,000 for 2024, tied to the annual gift tax exclusion amount that is [set by the IRS](#) [abletoday.us14.list-manage.com] and adjusted periodically for inflation. This is an increase from \$17,000 for calendar year 2023. The ABLE to Work annual contribution limit is also increasing. For 2024, that number is \$14,580, and is higher for Alaska (\$18,210) and Hawaii (\$16,770) residents. [Published via the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.](#) [abletoday.us14.list-manage.com]

As a reminder, an employed ABLE Beneficiary could contribute towards ABLE to Work and over the annual contribution limit if:

- they have earned income; and
- neither they nor their employer made contributions on their behalf to an employer-sponsored retirement plan during the year.

### **REPORTS, TRAINING, NEWSLETTERS AND CONFERENCE OPPORTUNITIES**

Register for an upcoming webinar with Higher Logic Co-Founder & CEO, Rob Wenger, **The Future is Now: AI and Automation in Association Software**. Take a sneak peek into AI tools coming to Higher Logic platform in 2024.

**Monday, November 20** [at 5:30PM ET / 2:30PM PT](#) →  
[\[info.higherlogic.com\]](http://info.higherlogic.com)

Registration is open for University of Wisconsin-Stout's innovation Expo. This year's Expo promises to be an event jam-packed of inspiration. Explore their comprehensive [agenda \[r20.rs6.net\]](#) **(click on the drop-down)**.

## **COVID 19 UPDATE**

An interesting article from NM-B Director Greg Trapp:

At least 14% of Americans have long COVID, research suggests by University College London One in seven people in the US reported having had long COVID by the end of 2022, suggests a large-scale investigation of long COVID and symptom prevalence by academics at UCL and Dartmouth. Having had long COVID is associated with anxiety and low mood, as well as an increased likelihood of continued physical mobility problems and challenges with memory, concentration or understanding, according to the findings published in PLOS ONE. The risk of anxiety and low mood appeared to be lower for those who have been vaccinated, including for those who have had long COVID. Co-author Professor Alex Bryson (UCL Social Research Institute) said, "Little is known about long COVID and its impact on health and well-being, but there is a growing body of evidence that many people experience persistent and concerning symptoms. "Here, we have found that long COVID continues to affect millions of people in the US, with some groups much more affected than others. Those who have ever had long COVID remain more likely to report low mood, challenges in carrying out daily tasks, and challenges with memory, concentration and understanding, compared to people who have never had long COVID. The researchers reviewed data from 461,550 people who responded to the US Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey from June to December 2022. They were comparing people who said they had never had COVID-19, with those who had had a COVID-19 infection without lingering symptoms, and those who currently or previously had long COVID. In line with the World Health Organization (WHO), they defined long COVID as the continuation or development of new symptoms at least three months after the initial infection. The researchers found that nearly half (47%) of people surveyed reported having had COVID-19 at some point, while 14% of the total had had long COVID at some point, half of whom (7% of the total) still had long COVID symptoms when answering the survey. The findings suggest that one in three people who contract COVID-19 may end up with long COVID symptoms. The researchers caution that a limitation of their study is that it relies on people self-reporting symptoms, while some people surveyed may have had COVID-19 without knowing it. The researchers found that people who had ever had long COVID were more likely to have negative affect (anxiety, depression, worry or a lack of interest in things), as well as physical mobility problems and problems dressing and bathing, all of which were self-reported by answering a questionnaire. Having had long COVID was also associated with self-reported problems with memory or

concentration, and with understanding or being understood. They also found that long COVID was more common in women than men, with rates also elevated among white people , middle-aged people, and people with lower incomes or educational attainment , while being most common in West Virginia (18% of the population) and least common in Hawaii (11%). Long COVID was also much more common among people who had severe symptoms during the initial COVID-19 infection, as 31% of people who reported currently having long COVID said they initially had severe COVID-19 symptoms, compared to only 7% of the people who had COVID-19 without developing long COVID. They say that further research is needed to better understand how long COVID causes its various potential symptoms, while better longitudinal data is also needed to understand the potential impacts of vaccinations on long COVID risks. More information: Long COVID in the United States, PLoS ONE (2023). DOI:

10.1371/journal.pone.0292672 Journal information: PLoS ONE Provided by University College London Citation : At least 14% of Americans have long COVID, research suggests (2023, November 2) retrieved 2 November 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-11-americans-covid.html> [\[medicalxpress.com\]](https://medicalxpress.com) This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.

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## **RECENT ARTICLES**

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Krause, James S., Clara E. Dismuke-Greer, Karla Reed, and Melinda Jarnecke. "[Characteristics Associated with Perceived Underemployment Among Participants with Multiple Sclerosis \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](https://links.news.mathematica-mpr.com)." *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 2023.

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Sinclair, James, Rebekka Jez, Joy Banks, and Suzanne Kucharczyk. "[Building Equity into Transition Practice and Service Delivery: A Call for Systemic Changes in the Field of Transition \[links.news.mathematica-mpr.com\]](https://links.news.mathematica-mpr.com)." *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2023, pp. 223–236.