FACT SHEET

EMPLOYMENT

BACKGROUND

Work is an important part of adult life. It provides autonomy, connectedness, and a sense of well-being, and it is the primary way people become economically self-sufficient. Work also allows us to contribute to our communities, both through the work we do and the taxes we pay. However, many people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) still do not have sustained, meaningful opportunities to participate in work in their communities. Many live on incomes below the poverty level.

Recent estimates indicate that 20% of people with disabilities in the United States participate in the labor force, compared to 68.5% of people without disabilities (United States Department of Labor, 2017). Barriers to employment for individuals with ASD and I/DD who require support services appear to be even more extensive. For instance, data from the 2012-2013 National Core Indicators Adult Consumer Survey reveals that while almost half (44.3%) of respondents receiving state I/DD services participated in unpaid, facility-based activities, only 8.1% of respondents worked in individualized, integrated jobs in their communities (Butterworth, Hiersteiner, Engler, Bershadsky, & Bradley, 2015). Similar employment outcomes appear to await young adults with significant disabilities, including youth with ASD and I/DD, after finishing high school. Only 26% of these young adults reported being employed at all in the first two years after high school (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012). These findings both demonstrate the scope of the issue and point to the work that still needs to be done in supporting people with ASD and I/DD to find and maintain employment in their communities.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 was passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and represents the first major legislative reform of the public workforce system in 15 years. WIOA expresses a clear policy in support of competitive integrated employment: jobs where people with disabilities are paid the same wages, have the same opportunities for advancement, and work alongside their co-workers without disabilities. Among other provisions, WIOA defines an employment outcome for state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies as competitive integrated employment; prohibits the placement of students transitioning from school into segregated subminimum wage employment without having first had the opportunity to try competitive integrated employment; mandates pre-employment transition services to prepare students for competitive integrated employment; requires people in segregated subminimum wage settings to be offered competitive integrated employment; and requires that vocational rehabilitation services support competitive integrated employment outcomes. Building relationships with businesses is a big part of WIOA as well. Businesses are beginning to recognize the contributions that people with autism can bring to their organizations; they need support in recruiting people for positions that will meet their business needs; disability expertise in the work environment for teaching work tasks and facilitating workplace success. The bipartisan Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act also provided individuals the ability to save money for disability-related expenses, including work expenses, without risking their federal disability benefits.

We must now build upon these achievements to ensure that people with autism who want to work, are supported in doing so. There continue to be multiple barriers to employment for people with autism and other disabilities, including low expectations and discrimination, accessibility issues, lack of incentives for businesses, and lack of trained providers to appropriately match people with disabilities to existing jobs.

Autism Society, July 12, 2018
Too many individuals are still being paid subminimum wages in segregated settings without being provided informed choices and proper training.

In addition, the ABLE Act restricts eligibility to those whose disability had an onset prior to age 26. This prevents many who could benefit from these savings accounts, such as those who contract multiple sclerosis or veterans who become disabled as a result of their service after age 26. Senators Burr (D-NC) and Casey (D-PA) introduced the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Age Adjustment Act (S. 817) in the Senate. This bill would increase the eligibility threshold to 46. Representatives McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) and Sessions (R-TX) introduced a companion bill (H.R. 1874) in the House.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Autism Society recommends Congress:

- Support and protect the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other laws that protect against discrimination.
- Double the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and the Business Tax Credit to incentive businesses to hire people with disabilities.
- Double the Architectural and Transportation Barrier Removal deduction to help remove access barriers.
- Double the Disability Access Tax Credit for small businesses.
- Address the constraints put on people with disabilities by having the limit for substantial gainful activity as such a low level ($1,970/month for those who are blind and $1,180 for all others with disabilities) that it discourages people to work, to accept promotions, and to start their own businesses.
- Phase out use of subminimum wage certificates (under the Fair Labor Standards Act) while helping states build capacity to provide competitive integrated employment.
- Provide increased Medicaid matching rates to states providing competitive integrated employment to individuals with developmental disabilities.
- Increase the supported employment program and provide demonstrations to increase customized employment best practices.
- Support the ABLE Age Adjustment Act of 2017 (H.R. 1874; S. 817) so that more people with disabilities can save for disability-related needs that may lead to employment.