

NATIONAL DATA SHOW RISING EMPLOYMENT AND OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

By John Shepard, Ryan Wedeking, Alberto Migliore, Daria Domin, Jean Winsor, and Agnes Zalewska

Introduction

For decades, self-advocates, state disability agencies, and federal policymakers have persisted in their shared goal to improve competitive integrated employment (CIE) outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) (Barrows et al., 2016; Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered & Green Mountain Self-Advocates, 2018). Data Note 101 marks a milestone in the national effort to advance this goal. As a product of the [Access to Integrated Employment Project](#), a Longitudinal Data Project of National Significance, Data Note 101 reflects a long-standing commitment to using data to inform systems change, support strategic planning, and drive policy decisions that improve employment outcomes.

In Data Note 101, we look back at where we have been and highlight trends from the national datasets we have tracked over time¹. The data tell a hopeful story:

- Systems are becoming better aligned with the values of community inclusion and economic self-sufficiency
- More states are prioritizing inclusive policies
- An increasing number of people with IDD are securing meaningful work

This Data Note serves as a celebration of what has been accomplished as well as a continued call to improve the employment and economic outcomes of people with IDD.

Decline in Facility-based Work

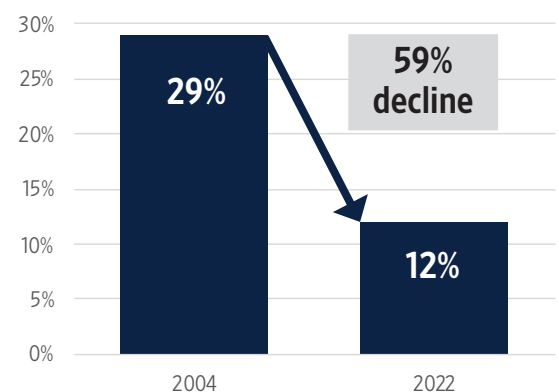
Facility-based work (FBW) is problematic because it limits inclusion, pays subminimum wages, offers few opportunities for developing skills, and maintains low expectations for people with IDD. Although FBW and pre-vocational services are intended to lead to CIE, Freidman and Nye-Lengerman (2018) found that most services do not support a transition to CIE. This has led people with IDD to be “stuck” in traditional pre-vocational services rather than benefiting from strategies that promote rapid engagement in CIE (National Council on Disability, 2020; Moore et al., 2018).

Data from ICI’s National Survey of State Intellectual and Developmental Disability Agencies’ Day and Employment Services (IDD Survey)² show that states are reducing FBW, with both the number and percentage of participants steadily declining. Since 2004, the percentage of people in FBW has declined by 59%, based on a change from 28.9% in 2004 to 11.9% in 2022.

Facility-based work refers to employment in settings where most workers have disabilities and receive ongoing support and supervision. These services are often called sheltered workshops, work activity centers, or extended employment programs.

Facility-based work refers to employment in settings where most workers have disabilities and receive ongoing support and supervision. These services are often called *sheltered workshops, work activity centers, or extended employment programs.*

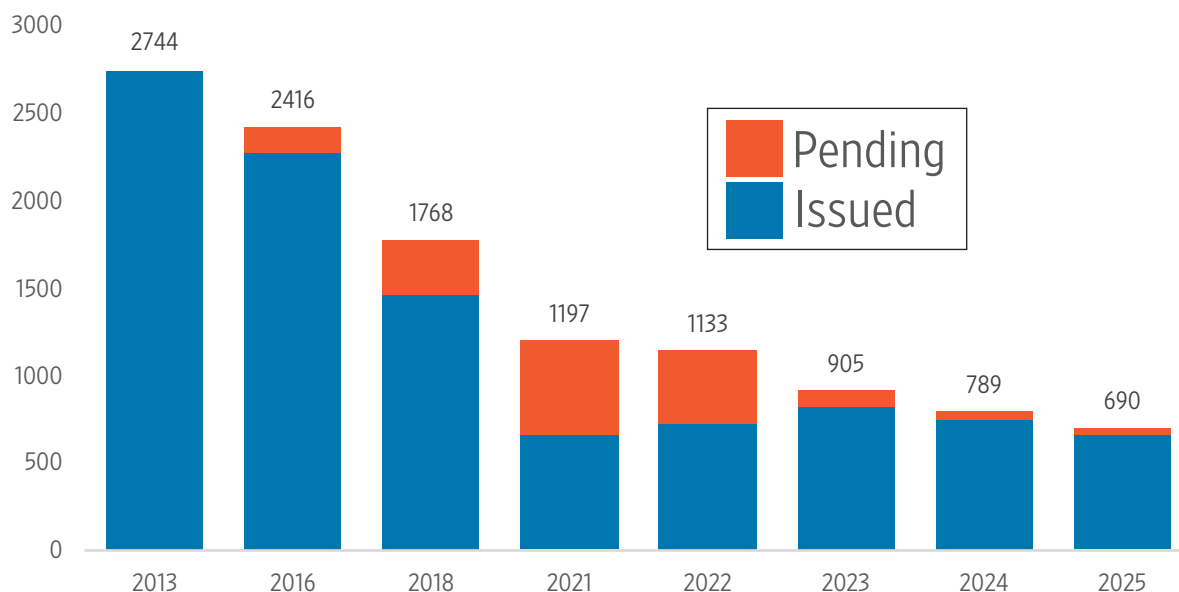
Figure 1. The Percentage of People in Facility-Based Work (FBW) in 2004 and 2022



Decline in 14(c) Certificates

Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act historically authorizes employers to pay certain employees with disabilities less than minimum wage. Due to legislative and policy reforms, both the number of 14(c) certificate holders and workers has dropped significantly—by 76%. Figure 2 shows the total number of issued and pending 14(c) certificates over the past 18 years. Since 2013, the number of issued certificates has decreased from 2,744 to 658 (US Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, 2025). Read more about 14(c) certificates in [Data Note 79](#) and [Data Note 80](#).

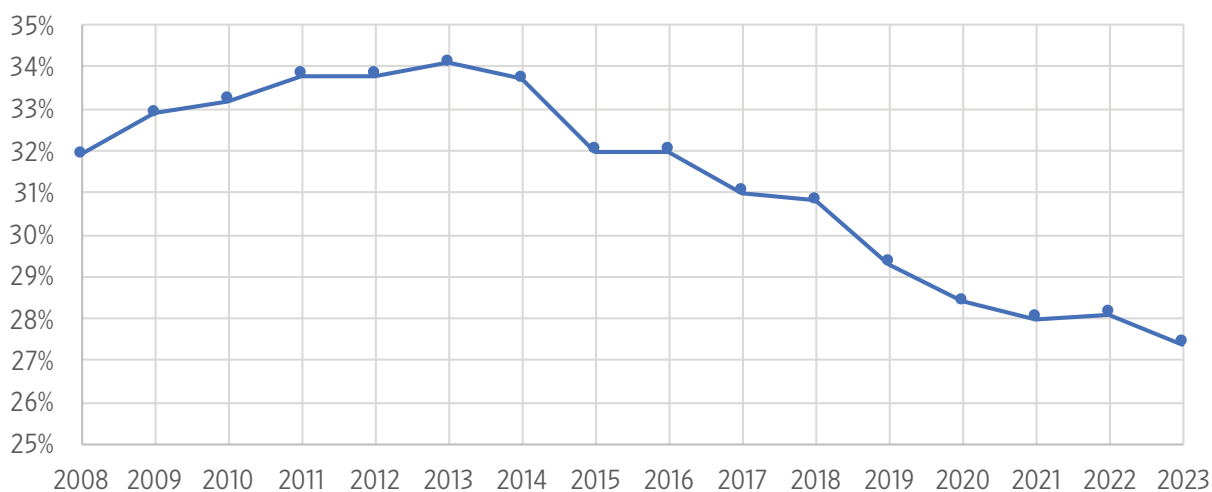
Figure 2. Number of 14(c) Certificate Holders



Decline in Poverty

According to data from the American Community Survey (ACS)³, the percentage of people with a cognitive disability living below the poverty line has decreased, indicating that there are fewer people with cognitive disabilities living in poverty today compared to 2008. Based on a simple regression analysis, projections suggest that the poverty rate for this population could decrease even more by 21% over the next 15 years. More optimistically, if current trends continue, the poverty rate for this population could reach just 16%, nearing the 2023 rate for people without disabilities (10.2%)—half of what was observed in 2008.

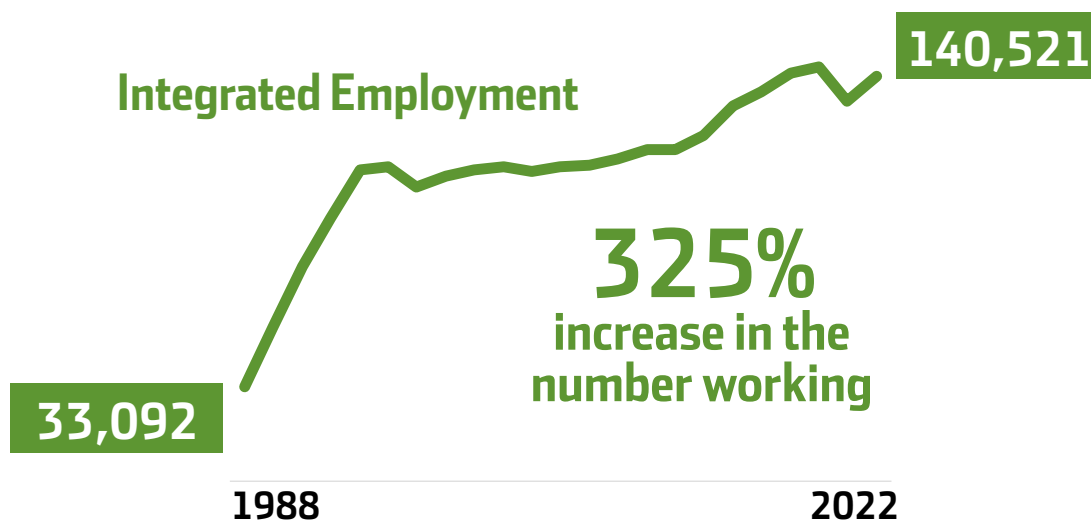
Figure 3. Percentage of People with Cognitive Disabilities Living Below the Poverty Line



Improvement in Employment Outcomes

Multiple sources indicate that employment outcomes for people with disabilities in general and with IDD have improved over the past decade. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2025), the unemployment rate for people with disabilities nearly halved over 15 years, dropping from 14.5% in 2009 to 7.5% in 2024. The ACS shows a strong trend as well: the percentage of employed people with a cognitive disability increased from 28.6% in 2005 to 37.9% in 2022, a 9.3% increase. Looking further back, data collected through ICI's IDD Survey show that since 1988, the number of people with IDD who have received employment services has increased from 33,092 to 140,521—a remarkable 325% increase.

Figure 4. Number of People Served in Integrated Employment from 1988 to 2022



Based on data from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), dataset RSA-911⁴, the percentage of people with intellectual disabilities who received vocational rehabilitation services—in other words, those who had an approved Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)—increased from 71% in 2005 to 82% in 2024. This percentage is predicted to continue to rise over the next 25 years. Although receiving services is an important first step, the main focus should remain on how many job seekers progress from receiving services to achieving an employment outcome.

[Check out Data Note 75 to learn how your state is doing.](#)

Conclusion

With an increasing emphasis on competitive integrated employment, the US continues a gradual transformation to support Americans with disabilities on a path out of poverty and toward economic self-sufficiency. While our data suggest progress, there is a need to continue strengthening policies, practices, and initiatives that prioritize employment.

Endnotes

- ¹ The datasets in this Data Note have different start and end years for the trends presented. This is due to the availability of data at the time of publication.
- ² This survey collects summary state level data on employment and day services distribution and funding from state intellectual and developmental disabilities agencies in the 50 states and District of Columbia.
- ³ The American Community Survey (ACS), an initiative of the US Census, provides a population perspective on employment, including people who do not have a connection with funded services.
- ⁴ RSA-911 is a public access database that captures individual characteristics, services provided, and employment outcomes at the point of closure from vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. Records are at the individual level.

References

- Barrows, M, Billehus, J., Britton, J., Hall, A.C., Huereña, LeBlanc, N., McVay, E., & Topper, K. (2016). [The truth comes from us: Supporting workers with developmental disabilities](#). University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *The Economics Daily*, 22.7 percent of people with a disability were employed in 2024. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2025/22-7-percent-of-people-with-a-disability-were-employed-in-2024.htm>
- Friedman, C., & Nye-Lengerman, K. (2018). Exploring the role of prevocational services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Medicaid HCBS waivers. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 49(1), 127-138.
- Moore, D., Haines, K., Bradshaw, H., Porter, A., Smith, J., & Foley, S. M. (2018). [Development of the progressive employment dual-customer model for vocational rehabilitation](#). *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 49(1), 149-160.
- National Council on Disability. (2020). [Policies from the past in a modern era: The unintended consequences of the AbilityOne Program & Section 14\(c\)](#). National Council on Disability.
- Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered, Green Mountain Self-Advocates, & ThinkWork! at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston. (2018). [A purpose in life: Why Employment First matters to self-advocates](#).
- U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division. (2025, June). 14(c) archive [Archive of certificate-holder lists]. U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/workers-with-disabilities/section-14c/certificate-holders/archive>

Thank you to ACL for funding the longitudinal data project of national significance!



This Data Note is a product of ThinkWork! at the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston, supported in part by the Administration on Disabilities, Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under cooperative agreement #90DNPA0002. This work is part of a Developmental Disabilities Project of National Significance. The Administration for Community Living defines Projects of National Significance as initiatives that address the most pressing issues affecting people with developmental disabilities and their families. The opinions contained in this report are those of the grantee and do not necessarily reflect those of the funders.

Data Sources

National Survey of State IDD Agency Employment and Day Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA-911), U.S. Department of Labor, American Community Survey

Suggested Citation

Shepard, J., Wedeking, R., Migliore, A., Domin, D., Winsor, J. & Zalewska, A. (2025). National Data Show Rising Employment and Opportunity for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Data Note Series, Data Note 101. University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.