REALTIME FILE.

nTIDE‑Lunch & Learn Webcast

June 4, 2021

CART CAPTIONING PROVIDED BY:

ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION SERVICES, LLC

Www.captionfamily.com

\*\*\*\*\*

This is being provided in a rough‑draft format. Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) is provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings.

\*\*\*\*\*

...

...

...

>> Hello and welcome, everybody to national transit disability employment or nTIDE lunch and learn series.

>> Just a few house keeping items before we begin. This webinar is being recorded.

>> We will post an archive of each webinar, each month on our website. At.

>> This site will also provide copies of the presentations, the speakers bio, full transcripts and other valuable resources.

>> An attendee of the webinar, you're a viewer.

>> To ask questions of the speakers, click on the Q&A box on your webinar screen and type your questions into the box.

>> Speakers will review these questions and provide answers during the last section of the webinar.

>> Some questions may be answered directly in the Q&A box.

>> If you have any questions following, please contact us at ...

>> Or toll free at ...

>> Thanks for joining us. Enjoy today's webinar.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Hi, everybody, this is Andrew Houtenville from the University of New Hampshire, the woman's voice is related to the Mandrell sisters, the singers from the 80s. So what was the name of them ‑‑ the Mandrell sisters, anyway.

So let's get started. So Zoom tips. If you need to change your sound, you know, sometimes when you put in headphones and things, you can actually choose where the sound is coming from. That's where the audio settings come in on your screen, you can click and choose whichever ‑‑ whichever sound system you use. Also, we have closed captioning available. You can click on closed captioning, you can also within that choose to see subtitles or even view the whole transcript. Then you can do some settings on how big and small the subtitles are appearing in Zoom. All right.

Let's get started about the lunch and learn. It occurs at noontime eastern on the first Friday of each month in connection with the release of the nTIDE report, which John will discuss. It's a joint effort of the University of New Hampshire, Kessler Foundation and the association of university centers on disabilities. So our ‑‑ today's program will be four parts. Part 1, John and I will report the numbers, Denise will give some news about policy and things going on around the country. We also have in the third part our guest speaker, Kathy west‑Evans from the council of state administrators of vocational rehabilitation. A long‑time partner of UNH and Kessler. Also we have in part 34, we'll do Q&A at the end.

As it said in the recording earlier, ask questions at the Q&A box as we go, and we can answer them either via text or cue them up for the speakers.

All right. Let's get started. John, take it away.

>> JOHN O'NEILL: Good day, everybody. Next slide, thanks, Andrew. The monthly nTIDE report is  ‑‑ it's a press release with an infographic looking at the latest employment statistics. We use data from the jobs reports, released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics on the first Friday of each month.

Andrew, next slide. And the data source is the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics current population survey. Which is the ‑‑ which is the source for the official unemployment rate, which the media makes so much of. By the way, we don't report the unemployment rate in our nTIDE report, because it's tricky knowing whether it's going up or down.

We report on civilians, ages 16‑64 who are not living in institutions. And this data has been available from 2008 onward. That was the year that the Census Bureau added the six disability questions to the national surveys, including the BLS survey. Those six disability questions were a great improvement over the disability question that was available prior to that. That was just Fukushima on work‑related disability. These data not yet seasonally adjusted, and that's why we typically compare to the same month last year. But since COVID, we have been focusing primarily on month to month changes. Even though the data is not seasonally adjusted. Simply because we really need to look at these short‑term changes from month to month because of the fast‑moving dynamics around the COVID epidemic and employment. Andrew, I'll hand it back to you to present the results.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Thank you, John. The first numbers I'm going to show are the employment to population ratio.

So that's the percentage of the population, ages 16‑64 who are employed. So it's not the unemployment rates, it's not 100 minus the unemployment rate. The unemployment rate is a very special ‑‑ it only looks at people who are in the labor force. And we can talk about that if you'd like. This is the percentage of people who are employed. I'll show you a time trend graph that goes ‑‑ this is my new chart. I started doing this last month, and I think I presented it at the new ‑‑ at the mid‑month COVID update, we have been having, but this is our new chart, and so it ‑‑ it shows you the ‑‑ it shows you people with and without disabilities together. They're separated, there's no overlap. There is a gap between here. This distance is a lot bigger, we are actually missing about 31 percentage points on this ‑‑ you know, there's a break here. But it shows them all on the same size. So the vertical distances are the same. So they're comparable. You can see here the great recession. So the big decline for people without disabilities, who the top line is people without disabilities, I forgot to copy over that. Need to make a note of that. I need to group that together. So top line is people without disabilities. And so it declines for the great recession and there's a slow kind of what people ‑‑ the slow Obama recovery and into the Trump Administration here.

Just before the pandemic, this is February, it declined between February and March and April, the employment population ratio declined from 74.8 percent to 63.2 percent for people with disabilities and been rising ever since. The ‑‑ for people with disabilities, it's ‑‑ it declined from 23.7 percent down to 24.1 percent. So basically one in four people with disabilities were employed at this time in mid‑‑‑ at 2014. So the effects of the great recession really were quite a bit longer for people with disabilities. It's potentially, you could say it was flat from 2011, and this is kind of an anomaly in the middle here.

In any event, people with disabilities didn't start to recover ‑‑ it was really this time here in 2017 and 2018 where the gap ‑‑ it's harder to see on this chart than it was on the chart I've been using in the last several months. This gap is narrowing here.

But then it flattened out over the last two years prior to the pandemic. At the pandemic, this is April, 31.7, declined with the lockdown to 26.3 percent.

And then we have slow growth after that. Both for people with disabilities and without disabilities, somewhat of a decline. This is the fall decline from when we had that bigger spike, that big spike in the fall, and early winter.

So it's been rising for pout with and without disabilities. I'll go to the next slide. It will pop up where we are for people without disabilities. For people without disabilities, only a very small increase, nonetheless, it's consistent pattern over the last several months. Not a lot of big jumps. I think that's what we are seeing in the overall economy. For people with disabilities, we have, again, a very small jump from about first think it was 29.9 to 30, 30.4. So we see a very small increase. And so while this is a nice pattern that we have an increase, we are still not back to the pre‑pandemic levels. For people with disabilities and not back to the pre‑pandemic part ‑‑ on this chart, it appears, if you look at just the raw declines, it appears that people with disabilities were hurt less by the recession ‑‑ by the lockdown, than people without disabilities. However, you know, that's percentage point jumps. Percentage jumps, if we click in and look at the percentage jump, the percentage change, not just the percentage point, but the percentage change, it actually is bigger for people with disabilities than it was for people without disabilities. People with disabilities have recovered better since the bottom, since the trough that ‑‑ the bottom of this. But if we compare these high marks, people with disabilities are still percentage change‑wise, behind people without disabilities in terms of recovering back to pre‑pandemic levels. So that's certainly worked for folks voc rehab programs, and people in the support programs that support people with disabilities, to get back to this nice increase this was seeing. This increase was really phenomenal. It was really fun to do the nTIDE report during this 2017 and 2018 and 16 because we were seeing a narrowing of the gap between people with and without disabilities.

You know, the hope is that with the ‑‑ with some of the things we are learning about distance work, that this gap would ‑‑ we'd start making progress. I think they used the term last week, come back better, be back better. That after COVID is hopefully put to rest, that we are back better.

There is another story in the trend. I'll show you the labor force participation rate. So it's going to look very similar. So this is not just the percent who are working, but it also adds in the percent actively looking for work. To be in the labor force, you either have to be on furlough, which we talk about in our mid‑‑month COVID update. Furlough, looking for work, or actually working. So you're considered in the labor force, you're actively engaging, looking for work on flour, or working. And so this is ‑‑ there's a decline for people with and without disabilities. And what you see during the pandemic, you know, there was this decline here at the very beginning of the lockdown, but that's really consistent with some of these kind of jumps that are basically due to sampling variation. The people with disabilities have really remained engaged in the labor force throughout this time. Meaning, they've either been looking for work or on furlough. We know that it's ‑‑ that people with disabilities are stay exploring engaged in the work force. People without disabilities really have much bigger kind of decline at the beginning and a slower recovery back up, where people with disabilities have been the same, it's a double edged sword. It's good news, it demonstrates people with disabilities are really striving to work, stayed engage either in furlough or actively looking for work during the pandemic. So that's really very good to see. Because the more you stay connected with the labor force, the better. In general, for job search activities.

The other thing it also could be indicating, it's a double‑edged sword, it could be indicating that people with disabilities really have no other choice but to continue in the labor market. They may not have the resources to handle kind of the big economic changes that occurred during the pandemic. Recall that about a third of the population with disabilities, lives below the poverty line. If you're in those situations, maintaining the meager kind of wage income that you have is really important. And so it could be a sign of the overall distress they didn't have the luxury of leaving the labor market

Kind of the pandemic, if you could call it a luxury.

But ‑‑ to I think this bodes well for people with disabilities, in terms of the overall recovery and really shows, back to the moniker we were using for quite a while, striving to work, people with disabilities were engaged in the labor market throughout the pandemic, and are striving to work.

What we need to focus on is turn this chart up. Let's get above 40. We are still a ways away from the 37 percent at the beginning of the recession. We need to be way over here. I'd love to see these lines get a little bit closer.

So I will turn it over now to Denise, that's it for the numbers. I'll turn it over to Denise. Are you there.

>> DENISE ROZELL: I am here. So hi, everybody. As we do normally, I'm going to start with the federal policy update.

A lot of this should look familiar to you, because I shared a lot of this last month. So probably the moment before. This is what's going on. So there are a couple of things you need to be on the lookout for. First one, we still don't have the so‑called infrastructure bill, if you've been reading the news, I have and seeing that negotiations are going on, there was the original Biden American jobs plan, there have been some Republican plans, a group of senators who are ‑‑ the ‑‑ back up one step, American jobs plan passed the house, it is to the Senate. So we are waiting for the Senate to act. There's a lot of negotiating going on. Query whether it will happen through ‑‑ we still don't know. The president continues to say that they are negotiating, particularly, I know, president Biden had another meeting today with Senator Capito, the lead of the Republicans trying to negotiate a compromise bill. If that doesn't happen, it will likely move through reconciliation, where it would be ‑‑ it would not be a bipartisan bill.

So the things you need to know about what's happening and as you listen to the news, what's in the infrastructure plan that is of particular importance to folks with disabilities, the money follows the person, permanent authorization, spousal impoverishment, that whole issue would be made permanent so we don't have to keep going every three months. The home and community based funding at $400 billion and doing around with 14c wage certificates.

The one I want to hit on today because you likely hear about it in the Muse, the HCBS, the 400 billion is often referred to in the news as elder care. Money for ‑‑ $400 billion for elder care. If you hear it phrased that way, what they're talking about is funding for Home and Community‑Based Services for people with disabilities and seniors. The Republicans do not think that is infrastructure in the traditional sense, which I supposed it isn't in the traditional sense, but don't think it should be included in this bill. The Democrats are continuing to fight for that. I don't know where that will hang ‑‑ will end up honestly.

It is included in the president's budget released last week, we'll talk about that in a minute as well. The other thing I want to say, we are finding ‑‑ we are pretty consistently finding that there is a look of understanding of what we are talking about when we talk about Home and Community‑Based Services funding. And the difference that $400 billion would make to that system. Doing away with waiting lists, to increasing wages, to all the rest of it. That's one of the reasons I think we keep hearing it referred to as elder care.

What I want to say to any of you on this call and have relationships with members you of Congress, Senate or house, and Democrat or Republican, have a conversation with them, drop them a note, send them a story of someone you know for whom Home and Community‑Based Services funding keeps someone in the community. I know there are a lot of stories like that out there. I know it supports a variety of employment, it's not just the services, which I don't think people understand either. It keeps people in the community, allows them to work, some of the funding actually goes to work and job development. The more that we can share that story, Democrat and Republican, the more likely we are to keep that 400 billion somewhere in some bill. So I really have been surprised at the number of members of the Congress who do not understand what this is. And I really think we need to be doing a lot better job across the board in sharing the stories of what this means and the difference it means to people. And I know you guys all have those stories, I'll really harp on that for a moment. So that's the infrastructure bill, you're hearing about it in the press, it's ‑‑ maybe it's moving along. They continue to negotiate, that's the most important thing to say right now. At some point they will stop negotiating and either have a bipartisan bill or move on through reconciliation in just a democratic only bill.

There's been a lot going on in the work force development arena, meaning there's been a lot of conversation, but not a lot happening. So I'm not sure how much I have to update here. We continue to watch, and Kathy may have more news too when she's speaking. We continue to track this, we continue to say from the disability community write large in a very consistent way, we have to protect WIOA and the language in WIOA. We have to protect competitive integrated employment and the definition we worked for so hard. That we need to protect the funding and helping those with ‑‑ in transition to move into competitive integrated employment. I don't know what's happening at this moment. There are bills out there, nothing is moving right now. Then appropriations, what I would say, the president's budget came out this week, the short version, and I'm sure lots of people have been reviewing the disability stuff, lots of organizations you interact with. There are no big cuts in this budget. In fact, most of the disability programs took small increases. I did he a took a big increase. The Biden's administration move toward fulfilling the promise of full funding. There are small increases to other programs, and nothing is done away with. No programs like we have seen in the past, some are complete cut, supported employment. That's not what's happened here. We'll see what happens as it moves forward. That's the most I need to say there.

Let's move out of policy, I'm happy to answer any policy questions, as always. The next slide. The EEOC, I talked to you a couple of months ago about guidance on employment and COVID. Particularly civil rights and people with disabilities. There are a new updated version of that. Since I told you about the initial version, I thought I should tell you about the updated version.

This one has been updated to expand on answers about how ADA and GINA apply when employer offers incentives for proof vaccination. But it's a very nice piece, it's expanded what we have talked about before. It's a great piece people are running into problems as they start going back to work, particularly around vaccines and reasonable accommodation. So this is a good one, if you pulled the last one, pull this one. Frankly, if you didn't look at the last one, you should still look at this one. There's a new resource out EEOC. This one is just two pages, and it's really direct, and it is great for sharing with employers, I think, and it's targeted at job applicants and employees, as well.

It addresses things like what if you're being harassed, what if you're at higher risk of getting sick, many people with disabilities are, if you're not being allowed to return to work for some reason, if you need to have a modification to employer's safety requirements. It's a really nice couple of pages on your rights as an employee.

As I said, I think it's very nice to show to employers.

Andrew, next slide. The National governor's association has come out ‑‑ our friends at ODEP have been doing some really good work around disability employment. This is one on the impact of disability inclusive COVID‑19 work force recovery strategies. I really like this one too, because it's from the National Governor's Association, which is seen as a pretty bipartisan group. And it's also ‑‑ it gives really good state‑specific examples of actions that states can take to ensure people with disabilities are included as people are coming back to work. I see a typo there. How do you expand access to essential services, how do you connect job seekers to work, digital access, all kinds of things, it has very specific state examples that you can use and it's pretty short, too, that's a nice thing. Next slide. This is on accessibility 101. I've been having more conversations lately about what is accessibility particularly in terms of websites and documents and digital products. I keep saying to people, it's more than Braille and ASL. This is a really nice piece that talks about that. It gives very specific examples of what accessible document or website could look like and what you should consider. It talks about readability in plain language, contrasting colors, which I don't see often enough. It talks about all kinds of things that are helpful and literally like two pages long. So go look for this one, it's a tip sheet, they'll be doing more tip sheets. Out of the center on knowledge translation for employment research, and I really think this is a nice one. This is one that I pulled and is going to be in my ‑‑ in my file folder.

Next slide, Andrew. Couple of ‑‑ there's some articles. This one ‑‑ a couple of articles recently on preemployment transition services. We continue to have conversations across the board about ‑‑ any time I see things like this, I like to highlight them for you, I think we'll continue to have those conversations, as we continue to talk about work force development. So these are a couple of ‑‑ one of them has to do with surveys of 253 parents of transition‑age youth on employment barriers and whether they know much about local services, hint, they don't know as much as they should. Variability based on how much ‑‑ where the parents might be located, urban‑rural divide, which doesn't surprise anybody. Some based on the disability category. I thought that was interesting, plus any time we are interviewing parents or people with disabilities, or anybody with lived experience, it's really important. The next one is on WIOA state plans, I thought that was good. Looking at content analysis, what's in WIOA‑state plans, with some specific examples of what VR is doing, that kind of stuff. I would be curious what Kathy thinks. Any time we can see and compare what people are doing stay to state, in state a, you can take an example to your state and say look what they're doing, we can do that too. Next slide.

We are beginning to see more work coming out of Promise. As you remember, we had somebody promoting readiness of minors ‑‑ I can't remember the whole acronym. The Promise project, beginning to see research coming out of it, the randomized control trial that looked at what happens if we surround not just a student but a whole family with services when they're transition age and lots of interesting things coming out. This one specifically targets. The program was over about a year ago. So we are beginning to see some data come out. This is based on the interim 18 month findings and specifically youth with autism. It's interesting to show, it is showing some of the things that really helped that came out of promise for kids with autism. Promise more than doubled job related training and employment rates among youth with autism. Increased the average annual earnings by 63 percent. It's that data that will help us say to the government, other policy‑makers, yeah, surrounding kids and families with services at transition age and providing the money to do that helps kids get employed and helps down the road and hopefully saves money down the road. This is targeted to autism.

Next slide, Andrew. Almost there. There is an entire ‑‑ I started to give you an article and realized it was an entire special JVR, journal of Vocational Rehabilitation. These are some examples of some of the articles in there, open sourced, I was going in and reading everything. Go find it. It's volume 54, issue 3 of JVR. These are just some examples of some of the articles. I thought they were fabulous. I know lots of you are ‑‑ I wanted to highlight this.

This is a call for any of you ‑‑ this is a ‑‑ it's called pathways to work, evidence clearinghouse, it is out of the administration of children and families, it's looking for interventions to include proven employment outcomes. An expansion here, but what they're specifically looking for unpublished manuscripts and conference papers and articles that aren't in existing research and databases. So for those of you out there who are grad students, those of you out there that has stuff you haven't published, submit it to them, they have 220 already in the clearing house, looking for more. I thought this was a great way for people to get visibility for the work you're doing that may not have been published. Couple of events, SSI, a virtual conference ‑‑ there it is, youth solutions, proposals to improve employment for youth with disabilities, it's ODEP sponsored. It's three days in a row, conversations, trying to increase employment of youth and each day they'll have policy solutions, which you know speaks to my heart and conversation, I thought this was really interesting.

Next one is a ‑‑ next slide, Andrew. Lessons learned from a decade of data. Another typo. I didn't proof read well enough. This is from Think College. They are looking at ten years of data. So this is data since 2010, sign up for it, June 29, I'm certainly planning on being on it.

The last slide, I couldn't not raise this with you guys. At AUCD, Tuesdays with Liz, we are calling it our sleeve up contest, why did you get the COVID‑19 vaccine, we are looking for short videos, submitted by July 16, of people ‑‑ particularly people with disabilities, friends of the disability community, submit a one minute video. We will share it on social media so you can then share it on your own social media and the top three videos ‑‑ they'll be judged on the most likes and comments and shares on social media. And the top prize you get to be interviewed by Liz Weintraub on Tuesdays with police episode. Those of you ‑‑ particularly those of you serving folks with disabilities, have them in there, we would like to get a ton of entries, this helps a lot of the vaccine work being done in the disability community. Just gets the word out there about who we are, what we do and we are involved in this.

So there's a link there or you can go to the website.

Okay, that's the end, I think. Yes, absolutely. So then I get to introduce Kathy K West‑Evans. That's what happens when I speak so quickly. The Director of Business relations and head of the national employment team at CSAVR. She's been working in the field since 1978. You've been around longer than I have. That's impressive fluent in sign language, and we are thrilled to have her here sharing some of the new stuff going on. Welcome, Kathy.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: Thank you, Denise, we have a lot to talk about. Great information, great information. We'll follow up after this. Thank you for that. I want to take a couple of minutes to share with you how we are working across the country so that you have background on what the National employment team is and feel free to reach out and join us. And then we'll share some of the trends we are starting to see. There are 78 VR agency in every state, territories and District of Columbia. And back in the early 2000s, we started realizing that though we are working at the state level, oftentimes we are working with the same business partners, same employers across the country. So we sat down with our business partners and asked how do we do this work better. We need to understand the skill sets you're seeking, your work environments, what you're seeing of trends in future employment so we are building career plans with individuals that are in line with the information that we are getting directly from business. Also developing those relationships. One of the things business told us is build trust. Often we hear we just don't know what we don't know, and we are afraid to ask. I think that, in fact, is the biggest barrier we all recognize. We need to open the dialogue around disability and help people see the talent and not the medical label.

So what we did, in response to our business customers, we asked our directors to each select a lead person their stay to work as part of a national team.

As we are working with companies, we can work around their footprint, we can understand their needs, share models across the country. Much like Denise was referencing earlier, how do we learn from each other. How do we build a plan with business that supports not just a job for individuals with disabilities, but a career. That independence. And really building that based on understanding a dual customer model. What are the goals of the individual, what are the needs of the business and the career opportunities and how do we make them match. We have been working on building plans with a number of company partners, I think at last count, we were about 350. When I say company or business, that includes federal agencies and state. Local governments.

So we really focus on the recruitment, the hiring, advancement and the retention, and that's a key piece to something I'll go into here. Also the early intervention, how do we help connect the future of that business and the careers that are there with students, and start that dialogue with students, parents and teachers at a young age. How do we help individuals start to see that vision for themselves and build marketable skills and understand career opportunities. We are partnering with each other entities, V re‑&e is the veterans readiness and employment team. Focused in the V.A. administration. Public voc rehab are veterans that have acquired a disability after service. We can jointly serve. CANAR is the consortium of Native American rehabilitation programs. Under title I, there are 79, programs on or near Native American reservations and Alaskan villages, we want to partner and we are partnering with them to bring them in and meet the businesses together. Then we have a number of community partners and employment networks that we are collaborating with because I think business really needs to see the breadth and scope of this talent pool. It's huge.

So the impact on COVID ‑‑ from COVID. I want to thank you all for asking me here to talk about this because we are starting to see the cutting edge. I think, now, some of the early research and research Andrew and John and Denise's area, but what they're projecting initially is that one out of three people who are hospitalized with COVID will have long‑term effects that will have a major impact on them going forward. We are already starting to see that. And one of the things that I want to share with you, legislatively is in the last round of the work force investment act, reauthorization, which amended the rehab act through title IV, there was a focus a on the services to business so that we could work with businesses to build these plans even prior to connecting talent, but there was a key piece in there as well. The understanding that it doesn't make sense to have someone lose a job and then come to public VR or any of the systems.

So within the rehab act for the public VR system, we railroad able to include a piece of legislation that says if a state is in order of selection, which you know the VR world, limited number of resources fiscal or human to serve the amount of demand.

And then they start prioritizing by those with the most significant disabilities.

So what we were able to do was to put language in there that gives the states the options of using an exemption. So if someone is in danger of losing a job because of a disability, you can serve those individuals as a priority. We have many states that have opted in to use that and we have seen the impact of that during COVID.

Again, we are seeing people ‑‑ businesses reach out to us and say we really want to keep people working, they're coming back to work, we have seen situations of hearing loss, vision loss, aphasia, what people would describe as foggy brain syndrome or what we have heard in the past described as chemo brain. The internal organs, people now being on dialysis because of the impact on kidneys. Lungs, just the general overall energy level of individuals and struggling to recover and how do you go back to work in that situation. I think a key thing is the mental health. This is related to a lot of things we have experienced in the last year.

Starting to see people with PTS coming out of long‑term hospital stays. You know, learning about things like hospital‑related delusions. And, you know, things that really people are grappling with on the mental health side.

So I think that's one area that we really need to take a look at. And figure out ways we can support people transitioning back into the workplace in partnership with our companies.

So, you know, those COVID long callers, as they describe them, that's going to have a huge impact on disability services. And I think now's the time to really ramp up that dialogue across all areas of our community to really understand how we support individuals and as they're joining this community, because we know the community of people with disabilities is one that people can join at any time during life, but as they're joining, how are we thinking about supporting their continued employment and independence. I loved it when Denise was talking about the home and community based services. Yes, Denise, you're right on that one, we really need to push and share those stories.

So thank you for bringing that up.

The services to business and the trends we are seeing there is interesting too. We started off the pandemic with helping our company partners really understand what accessibility means and PPE and looking at how we shift our staff, our teams to remote work. And there was a lot of really great discussions.

I am very connected to the Deaf and hard of hearing community, my husband is death. I think these masks, these clear masks should be here to stay. I think for people who have a hearing loss or Deafness, you've realized over the years that that's a always been a barrier in terms of medical and dental. When I wear this mask out in public, it's amazing the difference in communication.

So knowing that 80 percent of our communication is nonverbal, how do we make these mainstream, particularly because we are seeing some businesses that are continuing to wear masks for a while. That's something to work on, because that really is a communication barrier for close to 45 million people in our country.

The other thing we are seeing is, boy, in the last, I would say, month, that real rampup for looking at that increased demand for talent.

Now, a lot of our businesses are going to continue a hybrid model. A lot of the companies are looking at maybe bringing people back for a few days a week. Maybe beginning ‑‑ well, some we are seeing now, front line workers really never left and people working in the supply side of things never really left. But even larger companies are thinking ‑‑ bringing back people in the fall. And ‑‑ but that's going to be, in many cases, kind of a hybrid model of remote work and we are seeing a huge increase in contract work. What people describe as the gig economy. I think that's a trend we need to be following, what that means to individuals and candidates with disabilities.

As well as what a hybrid workplace means. When you're working remotely, what does accessible technology look like. So Denise, I'm going to be picking up the piece that you recommended, and I'm going to be sharing that with as many businesses as possible. Because I think that is a real challenge for the community.

I think another thing we are seeing, which is exciting is that increased work around apprenticeships. VR agencies, a lot of partners working with labor are doing some combined focus on apprenticeships. These are not what you would consider as the traditional focus on skills around, you know, things like carpentry, plumbing or electricity, although we do need a lot of people in those fields, working with companies like CVS with their pharmacy tech apprenticeships. Looking at what a lot of people call the nontraditional apprenticeships. It's a great way to learn and enter a company and take a look at options and be able to use that as a way to continue building their skill sets and developing their career. I think a key piece of the puzzle that is really exciting to see is the whole discussion around diversity.

And again, this has been a dialogue in our country, and much needed dialogue around diversity in the workplace. But what's exciting about this is seeing disability included in that dialogue. Being part of the company discussions where DEI includes disability. It's not an afterthought, and we need to be at the table in those discussions. We need to be focusing on that intersectionallity, knowing that disability is across all diversity groups. For some diversity groups, there's a higher rate of disability in racial and ethnic communities because of their lack of access to medical care, et cetera. But that's an important dialogue, and it's so exciting to see people with disabilities included right up front in that dialogue.

I want to leave you with a couple of thoughts. 73 percent of jobs in the next five years are going to require technology skills. Are our students and young people transitioning to work, are the people we are supporting in work, are they ready for that? A lot of this training is going to take place on platforms that are not fully accessible. Right now, we are working with Microsoft to take a look at how we can offer some of their training with stackable credential on a fully accessible platform. So, again, opportunities to build with our business partners, and to look toward the future for preparing individuals for the workplace and doing that because we have that information and support from business as we move forward. Because this is all about careers. This is all about employing talent. And talent comes in all packages. So those are my comments, and I look forward to our discussion.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Thank you, Kathy. So, again, if ‑‑ let me put up the screen. If people have questions, you can type them in the Q&A box. And we can answer those for you. Also, there's also ‑‑ we'll have Kathy's slides on archive at research on disability/home/nTIDE, and there's also feedback survey. Kathy, the question I have for you is, you know, you just said that last part around the need for technology, some technology component. We just did a survey of cashiers, nursing assistants, and ‑‑ Blanc on the last one. Another occupation. And every one of them reported like ‑‑ a huge majority of people reported IT as one of their primary responsibilities. It's kind of like we are scratching our heads wondering are they misunderstanding the question, are they really saying that they're working IT and a nursing assistant. And a receptionist. That was the other one. Really what it means, I think every one of us, a vast majority will have some kind of connection. If you're working on a construction site, you probably have an app to tell you what the next steps are or what the supply ‑‑ you probably have a supply, reporting system to report the materials that are needed or used. Everything is going to have an IT component. One of the things we are doing, we are starting at UNH one of the Think College programs. The first part, we are having ‑‑ we have a bridges program, which simply goes through the IT structure, some of the bridges, goes through the IT structure of the university, you know, students are engaged in lots of different platforms, and just like needing to know how to act in the dormitory, where the eating is and where the library is and where the buildings are, everyone needs an introduction to that IT structure, regardless of whether you're actually working in IT. I really ‑‑ I would be interested to hear if there are any plans to kind of prepare for that or any current programs that offer certificates to people around not IT in the traditional IT person but in the aspect I can navigate apps, I can navigate payroll systems, the payroll Sam new Hampshire, you need a Ph.D. to add a new person in.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: Yes. The whole what they call digital literacy. I think that that's an issue we really need to look at. And that's part of our dialogue with Microsoft. How do we start to measure people's current level of digital literacy. And where there are gaps that would keep them from being successful in the workplace. But you're right, everything is going, you know, digital. And so how do we interface with that in any job, because you're ‑‑ when someone's even in the trades, when you're out working, they're ordering supplies online, you know, they're doing their figuring of what they need and ordering it right there at the job site. So, you know, it's a new world, and that digital component is huge. So are people with disabilities being left behind? And I think that's a key issue for us all to look at.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Can you talk a little bit about ‑‑ so both in your work with employers, but also voc rehab more generally, the use of kind of digitally connecting with clients and networks, both either the traditional client or your employer clients. Is that where the VR counseling is headed, towards digital interface, and kind of boosting supported employment by ‑‑ so I could have like a VR specialist or counselor on my shoulder app. If I'm doing supported employment.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: Oh, Andrew, you're so right on those topics. You know, I think one of the things that our state agencies, because they're run at the state level, faced early on in the pandemic was how do you shift things to a digital platform, protect the confidentiality, and privacy of individuals. And it was things that may not seem challenging to private sector industries, but things like electronic signatures, and interface. When we are serving communities in very rural or remote locations, you know, our Alaska team, we have a lot of discussion about this, but even inner city where there's not access to Internet and online communication where we need to really think about that whole access to the Internet.

In terms of the supported employment or some type of job coach in your pocket, yes, there is already companies out there looking at that and we are having a conversation with one of our key partners about how you would do that, how do you support people's independence and providing that kind of support at all times. I mean, it doesn't always have to be a life person, there could be other prop's you can use. So yes, yeah, there's been a whole flurry of new look at technology in these.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Yeah, okay. So, again, if people want to ask questions, the Q&A box. I'll keep asking questions, though, John and Denise, I don't know if you have any. Denise, anything for Kathy in terms of ‑‑ you're muted, Denise.

>> DENISE ROZELL: Okay ‑‑ I forgot the mic.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: Technology, Denise.

>> DENISE ROZELL: I'm wondering, Kathy, one of the things you mention that I completely agree with is the whole apprenticeship issue. I wondered if you could speak for a couple more minutes about the issues that exist there and some of the stuff you're seeing happening. It's a great field for ‑‑ a variety of fields, but it does take some accommodation and adaptability and education of folks who are offering those apprenticeships and what that means, there's a lot of work at labor just in general. If you could speak in general to that, that would be great.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: That's a great point. I wrong of the conversations we need to have is how easy are we making it for businesses to really engage in apprenticeships, early on when we started working with the CVS on their pharmacy tech, that was a pre‑apprenticeship program. We did a test model, I guess, one of the first courses around that was offered in a VR office in Boston. So, you know, we were testing it. A lot of companies, the apprenticeship process can be complicated in terms of applying for it, to become official. So I would say how do we look at that process so we can engage more businesses in thinking through how you could establish an apprenticeship, and, you know, I think it would be key to opening up a lot of careers for individuals, and it offers them an alternative to ‑‑ or an additional training to maybe, you know, something that we would see in a technically college or university or college. So yes, absolutely. Make the process easier.

>> DENISE ROZELL: Yeah, absolutely. I like the stackable credential idea, too, that's nice.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: We are talking about what they described it as, you can come on a freeway ramp and pick up a credential, go off and enter another ramp and pick up those stackable credentials anywhere along your career.

>> DENISE ROZELL: What I like in particular, that's what the talk is in the ‑‑ the generic world. That is the talk we should be having within the disability employment community.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: Absolutely. Absolutely.

>> JOHN O'NEILL: Kathy, I had a question about the long haulers. When you were discussing the importance of early intervention with youth with disabilities. I was wondering what you were thinking about, the same concept, how that might be applied to long haulers who have had significant interaction with the medical community.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: John, another great point. I think this is where we need to help people transition out of that medical model, and start really refocusing on are they rejoining a workplace and what does that mean? And, you know, it impacts a family too, John. So I think there's a bigger dialogue here. You know, how do we open up that, and start looking and sharing stories about how people are maybe returning to work and what that looks like, and how is  ‑‑ how are the systems that serve individuals with disabilities across the board including Social Security and other systems, how are we working together for that early intervention, and I think that's an important discussion.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: The long haulers won't necessarily be in a rehab hospital setting. So the handoff from OT, PT and speech to VR and the SSA considerations, that kind of bridge is a shaky bridge.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: It is. They don't always communicate, Andrew.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: That's correct.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: I know that from personal experience.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: I know it too from personal experience.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: My brother transitioned out of the hospital. He is an individual with a significant disability that's served by the V.A., and they've done a great job with him, have a great special focus on spinal cord and traumatic brain injury, and he was admitted in an emergency room in a general hospital. They never communicated with his primary care doctors. No. I'm like yeah, no, he's not going to a nursing home, going back home, this is how we'll do it. The battle shouldn't be that hard.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: That's right. Communication will be challenging the more apps we have, apps are supposed to save things, they keep proliferating and the lines of communication can get halted, mixed, all kinds of things. All right.

>> DENISE ROZELL: That's another Home and Community‑Based Services example, so we're clear here.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: We'll talk, we'll talk.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: We are at 1:00, thank you, Kathy, again, for joining us today, thank you, Denise and John, thank you to everybody on the call still. I'm going to sign off, I'm going to share my screen so that we can ‑‑ share my screen, we had questions come in at the last minute.

Thanks, everybody, we'll shut down, have a good afternoon.