REALTIME FILE.

nTIDE‑Lunch & Learn Webcast

July 2, 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.

\*\*\*\*\*.

>> Welcome, everybody to the National to the 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 www.researchondisability.org/nTIDE. It will provide copies of the transcripts and other valuable resources.

>> As an attendee of webinar, you are 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 this recording, please contact us at disability.statistics.nh.edu.

>> Or toll free at 866‑538‑9521 for more information.

>> Thanks for joining us.

>> And enjoy today's webinar!

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: This is Andrew Houtenville from the University of New Hampshire here to bring you the nTIDE numbers along with Denise Rozell and our guest speaker for today. A few Zoom tips, one thing you might be ‑‑ need to do, select the right audio settings, if you have headphones or speakers, you can select from those. You can also choose closed captioning, there are a couple of options such ads showing subtitles, or view full transcript. NTIDE is  ‑‑ occurs on noon, eastern time the first Friday of each month at the release of the nTIDE report, released earlier in the day. It's a joint effort of Kessler Foundation, UNH and the association of university centers on disability. We are going to be in four parts. The numbers, I'll do the numbers, John O'Neill couldn't be with us today. Denise Rozell from AUCD will provide nTIDE news. We have our guest speaker, Clark RACHFAL from the Center for The blind. The numbers, just information, the nTIDE report is a press release, we have infographics that coin sides with the release of the jobs numbers by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. We use their data to generate these statistics. The underlying data comes from the current population survey. We look at eight civilians ages 16‑64 that don't live in institutions. We use 16‑64 in part because we don't want our numbers to be ‑‑ kind of reflect aging policy and disability policy.

That's one reason why you'll see differences between what we report and what's reported in the general news, is that they use people ages 16 and above. We also have yet so seasonally adjust the data. It takes about 10 to 15 years before you can seasonally adjust data. Also now with COVID, we have to adjust the seasonal adjustment for that one year decline in spring of last year.

This data first started being collected back in 2008. That's when they introduced the six questions that are used to identify people with disabilities.

Here are the numbers, I'll do the employment to population ratio, the percentage of 18 ‑‑ 16 to 64‑year‑olds who are employed, we'll look at people with and without disabilities.

Come on. Here we go. So the top line is for people without disabilities, the bottom line is for people with disabilities. And what you see is this is 2008, at the beginning, and the great recession actually started a little bit before that. Recessions are measured in terms of economic growth by gross domestic product. Employment sometimes lags that and takes a while for employers to start shutting down in response to economic change ‑‑ changes in economic growth.

So we had a high for people with disabilities of 74.9, a high for people with disabilities at 32.7. This is a really big, Stark difference between the two. You see a decline in the great recession, people without disabilities bottomed out at 68.8 percentage points. And people with disabilities bottomed out at 24 percent employed. Less than a quarter of the population with disabilities was employed at 2014.

The decline after the great recession lasted a great deal longer.

We start to see improvements with people with disabilities in the late 2,000 teens. Then it's starts to flatten out around 2019, 2020. Prior to the pandemic, we were kind of running flat. There was a narrowing of the employment gaps, the difference between these two lines, there was a narrowing in 2016‑17 onward. So 2018 and 19, kind of was full employment, didn't see very many rises after that, during that period. Then you see a huge decline for the great ‑‑ I'm sorry, the COVID pandemic. People with disabilities went from 31.7 percent to 26.3 percent. That's quite a substantial line, unprecedented decline ‑‑ one‑month decline. People without disabilities, same thing, big decline.

Then we see a slow ‑‑ a lot of ground gained at the beginning of the pandemic as companies started to be able to adjust and reopen. Then we have seen a slow March up over the last, say ‑‑ a bit of a retrenchment in the fall when we had the bigger, second spike, there were some closedowns there. We have been on a steady increase since the beginning of the pandemic with the first lockdown, true for people with and without disabilities.

Last month, we were at 72.2 percent for people without disabilities and 30.4 for people with disabilities. Heres the new numbers, up for people with and without disabilities, people with disabilities it was a pretty substantial one‑month increase. This is common in this time of year, if you ‑‑ you can scan over some similar times of the year. This could be seasonality, it could be the opening of June jobs, students coming back in. You know, the economy going into kind of a summertime peak. Nevertheless, it brings us almost close to the pre‑pandemic level back in March before the lockdown last year of 31.7. 31.7, 31.5, we are getting very close to being back.

Now, the statistician in me says, well, some of this is random error due to the sample design, it's not a consensus, it's a sample of the U.S. population. It has imprecision built in because it's a sample survey. Will this go up next month? I think it's ‑‑ I don't know, I don't really prognosticate. It's great to see this recovery, people without disabilities not so much the case. There's almost 2 full percentage points between where they were prior to the pandemic and today. Or at least in June. So one thing I lake to do, I like to look at the percentage changes between them. So employment went down as a percentage of where we are at prior to the pandemic. Percentage‑wise, it went down even further. Not percentage point wise, but percentage‑wise.

Then you can see for the current times of before the pandemic to now, we are very close to being where the pandemic ‑‑ prior pandemic levels. I would expect this could go down, again, but it's not unprecedented that we have seen in the past one‑moment jumps, but here we have a one‑month jump followed by several months of decline. You know, it's hard to say what's going to happen, I feel this is good news.

One thing we also looked at throughout the pandemic and over the years is the labor force participation rate. This is the percentage of people not only working but adds to the percentage that are actively looking for work or on temporary furlough.

So this gives an idea of how engaged people are in the labor market. If you tuned in before, people with disabilities really have done well over the pandemic in terms of labor force participation. I've hedged this a bit, it could be out of necessity. Substantially higher than people without disabilities. It could be out of necessity that I stayed engaged in the labor market, looking for work. Number of furloughed workers is steadily declining over the pandemic, the percentage looking for work is actually been increasing as a percentage of those who are not in the labor force, but who were in the labor force and not working.

So these are the numbers, so we see almost a full percentage point increase for people with disabilities over the last month. Not quite that much, about a half a percentage point for people without disabilities, people with disabilities outperformed people without disabilities, that's really a lot of words. People with disabilities outperformed people without disabilities in the labor market this past month. Okay.

One thing to note, we are actually above pre‑pandemic levels, 35.4 is above the March number of 34.9. So about a half a percentage point higher. I wanted to say when was the last time that people with disabilities, the 35.4 percent or above has been in the labor market. We came close over the 2018‑2019, 2020 period, but to get to that level, you actually have to go back to July 2009. Think back how long July 2009 was, great recession, Obama administration, two administrations, the Trump Administration, that was a long time ago we were at that level. That was Obama's first summer, and, boy, I tell you, it's ‑‑ it puts things in perspective how long it's been since people with disabilities have seen this level of employment ‑‑ of participation in the labor force. Maybe this is a good thing, maybe we are seeing good things, I'm hoping this will continue to rise in the months and years ahead. There could be something said about the distance working remotely capacity. This is a really good sign.

I'm going to stop there and turn it over to Denise Rozell for part 2 of nTIDE.

>> DENISE ROZELL: Hi, everybody, let's go to the first slide. As we always do, we'll start with federal policy. I do have some things to share today. I'm actually going to take it ‑‑ I realized when I wrote the slide, probably better to take it in different order. Infrastructure bill here's what's going on in Washington. If you're reading the newspaper or listening to wherever you get your news, you've been hearing about the bipartisan infrastructure bill. There is an agreement, we think, for a bipartisan infrastructure bill for $1.2 trillion that would be passed by Congress, bear in mind when I say that, that means we have an agreement as of today, we don't have legislative language, it hasn't been through either house, but there is at least a group that seems to agree, and the president has been supportive.

But that infrastructure bill includes things like roads and bridges and broadband and water, kind of the traditional infrastructure stuff. It does not include a lot of things that were included in the president's suggestion for an infrastructure bill, what people are referring to as human infrastructure. But that's one piece.

That piece of it looks like we might have enough votes to pass it in a bipartisan way in what they call regular order, it would go through exactly how it should go through, theoretically, which means it would be filibuster proof, we would get 60 senators. That part of the bill, we'll have to see if that happens. They're looking at summer to be working on that, looking at it probably won't come to any fruition until the fall.

However, as I said, there are a bunch of things that were in the president's idea of an infrastructure bill that are not in this bipartisan bill. That's what they are saying they think will end up going through reconciliation. Budget reconciliation, that's the process they don't go through regular order, the filibuster doesn't apply, you don't need to get 60 members in the Senate to vote for it. You only need 50, and it has to be related to budget, that's why it's called a budget reconciliation bill. The that's kind of where we are. There's conversations going on about that reconciliation. A lot of conversations about whether they will require one to happen without the other, how it will happen. But it's important to know that distinction. Okay.

Now, the things that were in the ‑‑ that we assume will be in this budget reconciliation bill important to people with disabilities, not that regular infrastructure, broadband, for instance, isn't important to people with disabilities, there are some other things in there. We have talked about these in the nTIDE before, the $400 billion of new home and community based services funding. The permanent money follows the person permanent, doing away with the spousal impoverishment provisions, those are all things in the, quote, human side of the infrastructure bill that look like now it will end up in budget reconciliation, or we hope it will end up in budget reconciliation. Okay.

Next step, the language on what that $400 billion would look like came out this week, it's in a bill called the better care, better jobs act, s2210, hr4231. They were introduced last week, I guess now, introduced last week. And there's actual language. What they assume will happen ‑‑ we assume will happen, the hope is better care, better jobs will get rolled into budget reconciliation. Okay. What's in better care better jobs you should know about the mfp, and the new funding under HCBS. The way it's set up, what it would do is  ‑‑ I'm looking for my notes, it adds 10 percent permanent fmap bump for home and community based services, 10 percent permanent, f‑map pump for Home and Community‑Based Services. If the states do certain things, there's a whole bunch of stuff they have to do. It also includes some stuff around workers and DSP's and direct caregivers. It includes ‑‑ well, it includes things the states have to do. I don't need to get too far in the we eds. What I need to say to you guys, I've said this a lot, remember employment ‑‑ there are employment services that fall under HCBS funding, there are things that are paid for out of Medicaid, HCBS, in the employment world. And those are hugely important, and it's hugely important that we get that funding, that's why it's important to everyone on this call, not to mention all of the other reasons it should be important to do away with waiting lists, 400 billion did not do away with all of the problems we have in HCBS, all the shortages of funding, I don't mean problems, all the shortages of funding we have in HCBS, but it does ‑‑ they think it will, at least, move us a huge step forward. The reason I need to stay that is $400 billion is a lot of money, and it gets a lot of attention, and usually if you're hearing it referred to on the news, you're hearing it referred to as elder care, that's what the news talks about it is, this Home and Community‑Based Services, I need to say to all of you, it is really important ‑‑ the bill, I should say, better care, better jobs act was introduced in the Senate with 40 cosponsors, all Democrats, it is likely it will pass with only Democrats on it. So it is important for all of you to talk to your members of Congress about why Home and Community‑Based Services is important. All of your members, Democrats and Republicans. Why is it important, why does it cover employment, what are your stories for those of you, tell about the stories of your lived experience of why this Home and Community‑Based Services are important and why living in the community is important. They don't all yet understand this, clearly there were ten members not democratic members who were not sponsored on the bill yet.

So we really need people to go out and talk with their members, they are home now, they're on 4th of July recess, all summer to be talking about better care, better jobs act, why Home and Community‑Based Services are important, why living in the community and working in the community is important. Okay.

Another bill introduced just recently that I want to give attention to, draw your attention to is the work without worry act, it's s2108. Hr4003. And what it does, it removes the Social Security disincentive to work. The work disincentive for people who qualify for Social Security, disabled child benefits. These tend to be people who are ‑‑ have long‑term disability. Usually developmental disability, but life long, what it does, allows people to work without losing those benefits. This is something I don't know if it will go somewhere this year, it was introduced, something that's really important, we need to be looking at. Lastly, appropriations, I have no news on appropriations at this point. They're moving forward, we'll see how it goes, I don't have any clue, it's pretty late to say they'll do it in regular order, we may be looking at a continuing resolution again, I just don't know. Next slide, let's move on.

Okay, couple of new resources from the employer assistance and resource network for disability inclusion, one on adopted an integrated telework policy, and what I like about this one, it's directed at people with and without disabilities, an integrated policy that clause how ADA applies to telework rules, there's a checklist, it's not a separate agreement for people with disabilities and people without. Here's a policy that works for everyone, here's how Ada applies to it. Really nicely done. Disability inclusive COVID‑19 workplace health and safety plans, this one looks at coming back to work and ‑‑ for all workers, I like the fact this is ‑‑ people with disabilities included from the beginning in both of these, next slide. The next one an article I somehow missed back in April from our friends, Dr. Houtenville sitting here, and Brucker. Archives of physical medicine and rehabilitation, changes in status of people with and without disabilities in the United States during the COVID‑19 pandemic, using current population survey. Andrew talks about this all the time on our nTIDE calls, here's stuff that you can actually cite in a different way. Hand drew can say more about this later during the questions, I wanted to be sure and point this out. Next slide. There's very interesting ‑‑ I had not seen this before either. There's a WIOA state plan search tool. I know not many people really want to search WIOA state plans, but having said that, when you want it, you want it. You can search in by your own stay with key words and also search across state plans for certain things that you want to go look for. It's targeted towards public work force development, stakeholders, not just obviously ‑‑ not just people with disabilities, it's all of your WIOA state plan in the state. But being able to action that at times is really ‑‑ access that at times to show your VR, this is what the state plan says, to people in the American jobs center, this is what the state plan says, I was thrilled to see this, it's a little bit in the weeds, stick this aside somewhere, at some point you'll want this. Next slide. We have been talking about universal ‑‑ we were talking about apprenticeships, I feel like I share something every month, which is really good. I think there will be lots of employment out there, apprenticeships have not always been accessible. This one is  ‑‑ ODEP has a whole series, aim initiative, apprenticeship. Inclusion models, about using UDL in apprenticeship. I can imagine tagging this to a place where you're trying to get somebody into an apprenticeship. Here's this, it identifies practices that have worked and are being worked in work‑based learning, talks about the challenges of adopting UDL and gives solutions and provides specific state examples, I can imagine using this as a counselor, somebody trying to get into an app appeasement, this is what you want to show people, this is how it cannot work for us.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Do you know if it's by occupation.

>> DENISE ROZELL: Not done by occupation, it is not. It is very ‑‑ for the disability community, it is pretty generic in terms of UDL, but on the other happened, for people who don't understand UDL, there's a lot of good suggestions.

Next slide. Explore self‑employment. I often shared stuff on self‑employment. This one came up, and I like this, it's exploring self‑employment beyond BEP, business enterprise program, this is out of the RRTC at Mississippi state, the RRTC on employment of people who have blind or have low vision, it's a self‑paced online course targeted specifically towards VR counselors but obviously for anybody, you can understand about self‑employment, particularly for people blind or low vision, talked about CIE, customized employment, WIOA, talks about ‑‑ I also like it because it tells you how to get in touch with the small business development center in your state who can help. I don't think we have as much relationship with them as would be good sometimes. So it's another connection to be made within your state. I really like this one too. Next one ‑‑ I guess I like all of these or I wouldn't be showing them to you. This is from the Bureau of Justice statistics, this one is not ‑‑ well, it says serving returning citizens with disabilities, it's disability specific but tied to people who have been incarcerated. As we all know, a great number of people incarcerated or leaving incarceration, state and federal) have disabilities.

Another typo, lots of them this month. So this was targeted towards the American jobs center, which I also like, not targeted to VR, it's targeted to the American jobs center, here's how you can help people with disabilities coming out of state and federal), here are some tips and resources, strategies, so for folks ‑‑ here's what reasonable accommodations are all about. So for folks who work with this population, I think this would be really interesting. It's another way of trying to help educate the American jobs center about what people with disabilities need. Okay.

Next slide. This is ‑‑ I have a couple of webinars for you, so this one is sponsored by the disability employment TA center out of ACL. It's talking about the importance of technology. Technological innovation in competitive integrated employment. Allison is the leadoff, she'll kick it off and then they talk about innovative workplace assistive technologies, role of federally funded assistive tech programs, real life examples, people with lived experience who will be on it, talking about their examples of how individualized tech has helped them achieve CIE. I thought this was an interesting one coming up next week. Oh, I have a couple of APSE things today, the first one, APSE is doing its COVID survey again, they launched a COVID impact survey and asked everybody to take it, it's short, only takes 10 or 15 minutes of your time. This is a followup to that. I say two or three, because I think they did a six‑month too. But anyway, not the point. So there's a link here to it, please take it, only takes 10 or 15 minutes, it's one of the few ways that we are looking at the COVID impact of employment and employment supports, for people with disabilities. We don't have a lot of other ways to track this. I'm sure we'll have research articles and stuff coming out, but this is a right now kind of a thing, and they've been good at getting this information out quickly so people can use it. Please go take it. One more APSE thing coming up. There's a webinar ‑‑ there you go, lessons from 2020 structuring virtual internships for young professionals with disabilities, again, this one is with the folks, APSE, folks on respectability and they're looking at in person internship programs, and how to do that remotely and what worked and what didn't, and I thought this one looked interesting too. Particularly we are run ‑‑ we are running virtual internships right now, and certainly we learned a lot after doing it last year, doing it differently this year, all of us are going to be ‑‑ frankly, we'll be looking at doing internships in a different way in the future, we have found it certainly is a way to give access to an internship to people who night not otherwise have gotten one, maybe didn't want to move to Washington, D.C., to work here, maybe wanted to do something else. And this one I think will be interesting too.

Next slide. This one is a national dialogue. This one is women and work. This is begin the Department of Labor and a bunch of the people at Department of Labor, women's bureau, ODEP and not targeted specifically to people with disabilities, targeted specifically to women, obviously some of whom have disabilities, they're gathering information, I'm putting it up here to urge you to go in and respond, open through July 9. To talk about women with disabilities, and the things that might be different or the things that are the same in terms of their barriers to full work force participation. Let's point out to folks at labor that there ‑‑ partly obviously cosponsored by ODEP. That's good. But let's make sure we are pointing out the things that are specific and unique to women with disabilities, that they might be facing, but also things that are the same. I find more and more, as I work in intersectionallity, that we don't do a good enough job of pointing that out from our side or learning from whoever the other side is. Whoever the intersection is.

I think ‑‑ I do have one more. I did this with you guys this time ‑‑ next slide, Andrew. I'm going to happen it once more, sleeveup deadline, July 16, this is a contest to get people ‑‑ particularly people with lived experience, self‑advocates doing really short videos about ‑‑ that will be shared on AUCD social media about vaccines, why you got it, how it was, somebody talked about needle phobia and it wasn't that bad. Somebody else talked about why they were getting a vaccine, wanted to go see their families, and we are sharing it on our social media, the person who wins gets the ‑‑ is the person that gets the most social media shares, that person gets to give an interviews on Tuesdays with Liz, which is actually a very cool prize. Really encourage folks to go in and respond, it's not just for people with lived experience, all of you, whoever else wants to go in and do one, please do. We like to get lots of people with various disabilities doing why are you getting a vaccine, lots of the stuff you are seeing about vaccines, people listen to other people like themselves or other people who are trusted experts, and that's who you all are. We love to get some more, the deadline is July 16. That's mine, I get the pleasure of introducing our guest speaker for today.

In the picture, Clark, you're wearing really nights ACB shirt. Clark, Rachfal is the Director of Advocacy and government relations for the American council of the blind. In this role, Clark oversees their legislative and regulatory agendas as well as grassroots and individual advocacy efforts, prior to joining ACB, Clark served in public policy positions for the National industry for the blind, Clark is also ‑‑ which I didn't know, a paraOlympian and a world champion in the sport of tandem cycling. We have asked Clark to come and talk about technology changes to employment, the effective technology, what we see coming, what we have seen during kind of post‑COVID, what have we learned, anything about tech employment COVID, and I'll toss it to Clark so he can have his time. Thanks a lot.

>> CLARK RACHFAL: Thank you so much, Denise, hello, everyone, I'm Clark Rachfal, the director of advocacy and governmental affairs for are for the American council for the blind, it's a nationwide membership organization with the mission to increase the security, independence, economic opportunity and quality of life for people who are blind and experiencing vision loss. So technology and its impact on employment. There's a lot there, focusing first on the pandemic, I think it's fair to say, if not for technology ‑‑ assistive technology, accessible technology, and broadband availability, the mental and social impacts, in addition to economic impacts on people with disabilities would have been much more severe. So in talking with our members over the past year, at ACB, we began doing community calls with our affiliate presidents and leadership around the country in late march of 2020, and there was a lot of uncertainty, and a lot of the fear of the unknown, what the pandemic would mean for our members and their quality of life and way of life.

These two conference calls became monthly, then weekly, and then daily community events, and these events were an opportunity for folks who otherwise would have been facing not only social distancing, but social isolation, to connect, connect with their friends, their ACB family, and the broader community. I mention this because, this is just a microcosm of the impact that the COVID‑19 pandemic has had on people with disabilities, not only socially, but you can extrapolate that out to running daily errands and chores, education and distance learning, employment and health care.

Early on in the pandemic, one of the first things we noticed to be impacted was transportation. A lot of folks with disabilities rely on public transit. As fire and fewer people were taking advantage of public transit, localities also scaled back public transit service. Pretty hard for folks to properly social distance on buses and trains and what have you. Also ride share services had to change their policies. So as a result, more folks were opting for independent modes of travel or modes of travel where they were encountering fewer people.

As a result, people with disabilities had less access to economic modes of independent travel, as well. We also saw this impact on delivery services, especially our members, folks who are blind rely heavily on, you know, Amazon prime, InstaCart, grocery and package delivery services to avoid transportation and having to go to, you know, stores, grocery stores, big box stores, as a result of the pandemic, the rest of the world discovered delivery services well. What went to routine grocery delivery wound up in a two to three week waiting period.

So as the rest of the world pivoted in relation to technology, so did people with disabilities. With respect to employment, some of the things we noticed is employers are more willing to offer telework and remote work accommodations to their employees. Previously we had heard stories that employers were reluctant to provide telework and assistive technology accommodations so employees would not have to commute and rely on public transit, paratransit services to go into a office or work setting every day. As soon as the rest of the world needed to take advantage of telework and remote work, we all found out a way to make it possible.

As a result, I think many folks with disabilities who otherwise may have been more negatively impacted in terms of their employment by the pandemic, due to the shifts in attitudes around remote work, were able to remain productive members of their employee, remain productive members in their community and also remain independent and self‑sufficient.

The reason that remote work and telework is growing, I think, more popular and successful, even aside from the pandemic, is accessibility in technology is becoming more mainstream. A couple of examples of this that I think are important to point to, are the inclusion, especially for people who are blind and visually impaired, the inclusion of screen magnifiers and screen readers in many cases out of it the box, whether you're talking about the android operating system and Google‑based devices, voiceover and the entire Apple accessibility suite included out of the box in every one of their product lines. Even Microsoft is making some very positive advancements in terms of their screen reader, narrator's capabilities. Ten years ago, the 21st century communications video accessibility act was passed, for people who are blind and visually impaired, we often think about this as the law that made audio description, you know, the verbal narration of the visual elements of a program that are inserted in the pauses of dialogue, making entertainment programming more accessible for tv's and movies. That was part of the CDAA, but also requirements for telecommunications accessibility, including text to speech in wired and wireless communications, as well as accessibility requirements for web and mobile Internet browsers.

Now, we still don't have a regulations regarding website accessibility, if you ask people who are blind, we don't need a separate law or regulations around web access, the private sector may disagree, but the ADA was intended to be an Evergreen law, so certainly we know title II and section 508, as well as section 504 require equal access, including to technology and services offered by government and is funded by government. Title III in the private sector still has some questions, that's because the Department of Education has not issued regulations or final rule‑making on website accessibility, but the Department of ‑‑ excuse me, the Department of Justice has been quite clear for 25 years now in statements of public interest, in other forms, as well as am cuss briefs and court cases, that the ADA does apply to the Internet.

As a result, we are seeing more technology, whether it's websites, mobile apps and services becoming more accessible and designed with accessibility and usability for people who are blind, as well as the broader community in mind right out of the box. I think that's definitely a positive. One area that this still is not where it could be, is the software and technology offered by third party vendors.

So even when employers are trying to do the right things, we still hear stories that, whether for HR, payroll, continuing education, and any other form of third party vendor software, that there's still work that needs to be done in this space to offer full and equal access for employees with disabilities.

Going forward, I think that there's ‑‑ as we come out of the pandemic, there are further opportunities, there's some questions as well. So in the transportation space, I think you'll have employers who are more likely to provide flexibility to employees with disabilities. Not requiring them to be in the office 9:00 to 5:00, you know, five days a week, but maybe more flexible work schedules. I think that's not only for people with disabilities, that will be the case across the board going forward. In transportation, you know, local jurisdictions that had initially scaled back public transit offering are starting to ramp them back up, however, we are seeing a shift in this space, and the concern for folks with disabilities is that if cities and municipalities decide to move away from fixed route public transportation and do more on demand transportation service, then the rules governing paratransit may not apply.

There's uncertainty as what transportation options and training for folks providing public transportation will look like when it comes to surveying individuals with disabilities.

Ride shares have certainly ‑‑ ride share services like Lyft and Uber have certainly been beneficial to people who are blind and visually impaired. Especially once the service animals are allowed in the vehicle, there are still questions at times that whether folks were denied access due to having service animal, and I know this is a big issue for the broader disability community, wheelchair users, power wheelchair users and so forth, but it is a tool for folks who are blind and visually impaired has provided more independent access and has made us more engage and included in our community and broadened opportunities for employment. On the horizon in transportation, autonomous vehicles are what holds the most promise for independent travel, and greater economic opportunity. We are engage on that front, ensuring that universal design and accessibility is included at the forefront of these conversations. And as technology becomes more accessible, we need to ensure that it's available and that folks have a reason to adopt it as well. Broadband adoption is something that's at the forefront, not only the Federal Communications Commission, implemented the broadband, so if folks are disabled, elderly, low income, minority, at the intersection of any of these groups, you can find out ways to apply and receive a monthly subsidy, as well as a hardware device subsidy. To make broadband more affordable. Obviously affordability is only one aspect of adoption, we need to have service that is available, affordable, and we need to have the digital literacy skills to understand why this technology is so vital, again, for telehealth, for distance learning, remote health care, and so forth.

So in addition to the emergency broadband benefit, we touched on broadband, certainly after the pandemic, That will still be a focus, again, telework isn't going anywhere, telehealth isn't going anywhere, the flexibility of distance learning is a priority. Technology accessibility improves in the future, this will just provide more opportunities for people with disabilities and especially our members.

Some areas that still have some work to be done, you know, Denise spoke about the WIOA state plans, Congress is reluctant at this time to revisit vocational rehabilitation and competitive integrated employment, and under WIOA, one thing we are noticing from our members, less for individuals who are either ‑‑ have a congenital or degenerative condition, but folks who acquire vision loss later in life, a lot of specialized Rehabilitation Services for people who are blind are tied to vocational rehabilitation, not to medical rehabilitation or physical therapy. So it's a lot to ask for an individual to noble e not only adjust to a person living with vision loss but seeking employment at the same time. And the homemaker exemption was eliminated with the regulations following WIOA, and that ‑‑ the homemaker exemption did provide a very beneficial path, especially for individuals who lost their vision later in life to get on their feet again, adapt to their new normal so that they could then have the independent living skills O&M training, so they could then want to re‑enter the work force and have the necessary skills and opportunities through vocational rehabilitation to take full advantage of that environment. I think there's a lot to be optimistic about. We know that there are still challenges that remain. And Denise, I think that's about it. So transportation, scaled back during the pandemic, but it seems like things are coming back online, there should be more flexible transportation options day to technology and innovation, and accessible technology, there's a large number of lawsuits in this space, but, again, the disability communities of one mind and the Department of Justice is of a similar mind that the ADA does cover communications access, it covers mobile and web browsers, and we just need to ensure that the laws are enforced and that people with disabilities can remain active and engage members at work and in their local community. So thank you.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Thank you, Clark. We have about ten minutes or so for questions and answers. If people want to type their questions in the box, in the Q&A box, we can ask any of the panelists that have been on today those questions. I have a question for you, Clark, or maybe it's more of an observation. How many areas of my life your discussion talked about, right. Transportation, web, you know, the remote world that I live in now, and how these are really new environments that are kind of being opened up. New cultural shifts in remote work. And everybody ‑‑ when we were talking before starting the webinar, the idea of going back to work with everyone you know and new employees, even, there's some employees that are two or three employees in my office that I've never worked with other than remotely. It's going to be interesting to see how flexible some employers are versus others, or some supervisors are versus others. In our line of work at the university, it's really a supervisor that coordinates the remote work assignment, if I'm one that doesn't like remote work, I like to have friends at work, you know, I can do that over remotely too. It will be interesting to see how we adjust to that new environment.

>> CLARK RACHFAL: This is Clark. A lot of times, I've been able to just boil it down to two big buckets, transportation access and information access. The areas of issues and importance for people who are blind and visually impaired. To your point about what's going to be the return to work policy, and will it be back in person or hybrid, one area that potentially of concern, and concern might be too harsh, an area we will be keeping an eye on in the future is whether employers decided that all workers with disabilities should work remote, you know, is that just easier. Is that going to be the accommodation offered, versus people with disabilities choosing based off their individual needs, whether they are more productive and effective in the workplace or in the remote environment, and then not only what that means for checking the box of hiring someone with a disability or what it means for upward mobility and career advancement as well.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: It is going to be fascinating. I think people learn so much by force, you know, we are forced to learn remote work, and to get ‑‑ navigate with colleagues, and remotely. I think we learned a lot, and I think the workplace can be more flexible now, than it was before. I think as you alluded to, you didn't know how it worked, and would a person be effective, could we trust them to work remotely? I think now we'll have a lot more experience about how to supervise people in that way and how to be more productive or people productive.

One question I had ‑‑ that came in was rather than looking at WIOA ‑‑ I'm sorry, WIOA, to kind of address the homemaker exemption, go through Medicaid, or some other service, WIOA, the attendee positions it might be dangerous to open up ‑‑ reopen WIOA and kind of look at the provisions one by one or ‑‑ not quite sure ‑‑ their concerned that opening up WIOA could change things for the negative.

>> CLARK RACHFAL: This is Clark. I think that ‑‑ I understand that concern, centers for Medicare and Medicaid services haven't been the most friendly to people who are blind or visually impaired, the eye glass exemption rule from 2008 as the reason people who are blind and visually impaired don't have Medicaid coverage for low vision devices. Video magnifying devices that can cost upwards of thousands of dollars, those are not covered because they have a lens and equated to being comparable to eye glasses. So there's a lot that is still to be explored in this space. Related to CMS and HHS, there still aren't rules requiring accessibility for durable medical equipment. As diabetes is the leading cause of blindness for working age adults, as soon as you lose your vision, you won't have a fully accessible insulin pump or glucose monitor to care for your condition.

There's a lot to unpack there, but I think it is a valid question and point.

>> DENISE ROZELL: I'll jump in too, Andrew, because we have talked about this on this call before. I didn't talk about work force today and opening WIOA. There is ‑‑ there's a question and certainly think people are ‑‑ the fear is, which the fear is that there ‑‑ I think it's a legitimate fear, there's a real threat to competitive integrated employment and the definition of CIE by opening up WIOA. And particularly by opening up the rehab sections of WIOA. And I think that's the concern that's being raised. I think there's a conversation going on within the disability community about how best to protect competitive integrated employment in this context, I think that's the goal we all support, is that the importance of competitive integrated employment and some of the definitions that happened in WIOA last time. And then from there, how do we protect that and one of those ways, clearly is  ‑‑ that's what AUCD is saying, not open up WIOA and protect those ‑‑ not look at that, but try and do things in other ways, but, again, it's a very legitimate conversation that continues to happen within the disability community.

>> CLARK RACHFAL: Denise, on that point, you just reminded me when we spoke earlier, we had discussed the executive order from the administration regarding the $15 minimum wage for federal service contractors. I think that that's going to be a rising tide that lifts all boats, certainly for the disability community. So I'm excited to see how that plays out, and what that does, whether it's research data from ‑‑ even the American foundation for the blind as done with their flattening the ‑‑ flattening the inaccessibility curve which they did as a broad survey last year, more recently been focused on surveys that ‑‑ called access and engagement around accessibility in education. But again, back to employment, I think that could have very positive benefits for our community, and be a strong catalyst for those competitive integrated conversations.

>> Knock on wood, I hope you're right. I have said before, I hope we are at a tipping point, but that will ‑‑ I'm putting my policy hat back on, that will take all of us having that conversation with all members of Congress. I hope for all of you on this call, you continue to have those conversations, because there are people you would not expect who need to hear who need to hear that.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: One interesting thing, you know, it strikes back to kind of fundamental reforms in Social Security and vocational Rehabilitation Services in general, that there was such a thing ‑‑ the V.A. actually has some conditions where, for the first two years, you're at full percentage rating, but as you get ‑‑ as you accommodate and get used to a prosthetic or used to some device, it will actually decline, your percentage rating will decrease. And the idea is that of temporary benefit, right, as people ‑‑ the idea of the homemaker exemption, the idea someone is expected to work straight after losing their sight, well it could be similar to the V.A. where you have a certain buffer time to ramp up and get the supports in place that you want and need. So the idea of this big 01 Social Security benefit where you're either on or off, you're disabled or not disabled ‑‑ sorry, disability or not disability, we have a variety of experiences, and sometimes those experiences are temporary, at least, you know, in terms of the onset of disability, and the time or period which people need to adjust.

>> CLARK RACHFAL: This is Clark. I think that's a really interesting observation, I had not heard that comparison before. On ‑‑ related to the homemaker adjusting to disability, technology has made even remote services more accessible, orientation and mobility instructors for people who are blind and experiencing vision loss are able to use audio mapping technology, such as Microsoft soundscape to provide orienteering assistance. You can set up pins and have your student navigate to that point, so in a remote environment without being in physical contact or close to them while doing it. So, you know, exciting new technologies playing a role in rehabilitation as well. Talking about Social Security, there's a number of things to Social Security.

>> DENISE ROZELL: A whole other nTIDE.

>> CLARK RACHFAL: Eliminating the SSDI cash cliff, progress it throughout your career or even for those who need to rely on Social Security if they are no longer employed, the waiting periods for ‑‑ you know, SSDI, S as I and Medicaid along with that benefit as well.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: There's lots there. And the bill you mentioned, Denise, that's interesting. Around 600 individuals, 100,000 individuals or 600,000 individuals, I forget the exact number on disability in that program. You know, they are eligible based on ‑‑ for DI on their parent's benefit, and that's a contribution that's supporting that payment. It will be really interesting to see if that passes, how ‑‑ when the cliff goes away, what that group of people ‑‑ I wouldn't say representative of all DI beneficiaries, but it will be really interesting to see how ‑‑ it will take a while for families and people to adjust. They'll be able to work more hours.

>> DENISE ROZELL: Looking at the time, Andrew. I'm going to be your time keeper.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Thank you, Clark, very much.

>> DENISE ROZELL: Thank you.

>> CLARK RACHFAL: Thank you all for the opportunity.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Yeah, you too. All right, everybody, we'll shut down today, thanks, everybody, for showing up on this near 4th of July weekend. Thanks, Clark, goodbye, everybody.