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**Closing the Employment Gap for People with Disabilities**

There is a large employment gap between people with disabilities and people without disabilities. As late as June 2017, just 27.9 percent of working-age people with disabilities were employed which lags far behind the 72.8 percent of those working without disabilities. This creates a 45-point employment gap, creating devastating consequences for the disability community.

The large gap means people with disabilities are far more likely to live in poverty, depend on government programs and remain socially and economically segregated from mainstream America. Those facing the employment gap include veterans, people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities (I/DD) and young people hoping for their first break.

A collaborative effort focused on three different strategies may offer a solution. First, employers across the state need to realize people with disabilities can flourish in the workplace and focus recruiting efforts on creating inclusive, diverse workforces and accessible, welcoming environments. The NC Business Leadership Network (NCBLN) is working with companies to source, hire and retain people with disabilities while creating an accommodating and inclusive culture for everyone.

Secondly, North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation (NCVR) wants to expand its talent pool by reaching out to more people with disabilities and integrating them into the state’s vocational rehabilitation programs. In helping close the employment gap, NCVR placed well over 6,000 people with disabilities in jobs last year and currently has more than 4,000 “Job Ready” candidates actively seeking employment – but these numbers need to grow.

And thirdly, the disability community itself has to encourage more people with disabilities – especially young people – to make every effort to prepare themselves for jobs and careers. NCVR offers job planning and placementassistance, pre-employment transition services, on-the job support and school to work transition services in an effort to assure success.

In addition, the state’s community colleges and universities offer inclusive post-secondary education programs and transition services for students with disabilities. These programs focus on the early integration of potential employees into the workforce through internships and other educational programs that can begin as early as high school. They also provide transition programs to help young people with disabilities move from high school to college or directly to work. For those with complex physical or mental disabilities, there are a variety of assistive technologies available to improve accessibility and help people perform their job functions.

People with disabilities want to live as independently as possible, participate in their community and enjoy a sense of financial well-being. Closing the employment gap and integrating more people with disabilities into the workforce is the road map to independence and financial security in the future.

In October, the state celebrates **National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)** to bring attention to the value of employees with disabilities and create more inclusive, competitive jobs in mainstream industries. The North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities (NCCDD), North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation (NCVR) and the NC Business Leadership Network (NCBLN) are launching the EveryBody Works NC campaign as a collaborative effort to reduce the employment gap and build a more inclusive workforce in North Carolina. Visit the website at [*everybodyworksnc.com*](http://www.everybodyworksnc.com/) for more information.

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**About Everybody Works NC**

The Everybody Works NC campaign is increasing awareness of the untapped pool of talent found in the disability community and creating more and more job opportunities for people with disabilities. October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) which kicks off the year-long EveryBody Works NC campaign with a statewide speaking tour, media relations programs, social media and a series of special events. Visit [*EveryBodyWorksNC.com*](https://www.everybodyworksnc.com/) for more information.

The campaign is led being by the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities (NCCDD), the North Carolina Business Leadership Network (NCBLN) and the North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to promote and support inclusive workforce strategies.