

NORTH CAROLINA
**State
Rehabilitation
Council**

2024 REPORT



MISSION OF THE COUNCIL

To enhance the employment, independent living and equality of individuals with disabilities in the state of North Carolina.

PURPOSE OF THE COUNCIL

- To advise and work in partnership with the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities.
- To assist the division in accomplishing its mission to promote employment and independence for people with disabilities through customer partnerships and community leadership.
- To provide guidance, input and recommendations relative to the development and expansion of vocational rehabilitation services and programs in an effort to maximize employment opportunities and independence for individuals with disabilities.
- To advocate for legislation that supports individuals with disabilities in making successful transitions into the workforce and the community.
- To provide customers and stakeholders of vocational rehabilitation services with a formal mechanism to influence policy and the direction of the division at the highest administrative level of the state.

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2024 HIGHLIGHTS



EIPD helped 2,081 individuals with disabilities achieve competitive integrated employment



Clients earned an average **hourly wage of \$12.85** and worked an average of 28 hours per week



36% of EIPD's successful employment outcomes were achieved by transition-age youth



The **Independent Living Rehabilitation Program** helped **675** people achieve their goals for independence



The **North Carolina Assistive Technology Program** made **943** short-term device loans and made contact with **7,634** people through outreach efforts



The **Client Assistance Program** helped **683 clients** and provided mediation, negotiation and advocacy in **202** cases

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



F. Michael Maybee,
Chair, NCSRC

On behalf of the State Rehabilitation Council and those we serve, I would like to thank you for your partnership with, support of, and interest in vocational rehabilitation services. It has been a very active year for the SRC as we continue to advance our statutory responsibilities and fulfill our role as advocate for the employment, independence, and rehabilitation needs of people with disabilities. Among the 2024 highlights was the council's commitment to expanding participation in four major areas:

- Hosting virtual forums to gather public input regarding EIPD services;
- Providing input and review for the development and implementation of North Carolina's State Plan;
- Advocating for enhanced state funding from the NC General Assembly to improve the recruitment and retention efforts for the state EIPD staff; and,
- Enhanced collaboration and information sharing with other agencies to further enhance our services for North Carolinians with disabilities.

You will find the council's participation in these areas detailed in this report. The SRC's work continues to be guided by our strategic plan goals to foster greater collaboration in the delivery of VR services among the various divisions of the NC Department of Health and Human Services; to increase knowledge of the SRC and its purpose; to explore and apply new technologies; and to enhance understanding of what participants want and what the VR program can offer in terms of employment and independent living services.

I am pleased to report the work and accomplishments of the SRC. Most importantly, I'd like to thank the members for their work and dedication as advocates for individuals with disabilities in communities all across North Carolina.



OBJECTIVES

Consulting with North Carolina workforce development board to review, analyze and advise the NC Department of Health and Human Services regarding the performance of the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities, particularly with responsibilities related to:

- 1**
 - eligibility, including order of selection
 - the extent, scope and effectiveness of services provided
 - functions performed by state agencies that affect or potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities to achieve competitive integrated employment outcomes

Partnering with the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities to:

- 2**
 - develop, review and agree to state goals in accordance with section 101(a)(15)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (the Act);
 - evaluate the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation program
 - submit progress reports to the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) of the U.S. Department of Education in accordance with section 101(a) (15) (E) of the Act

Advising the NC Department of Health and Human Services and the Division Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities regarding:

- 3**
 - authorized activities to be carried out under this the Act
 - development of and amendments to the Unified State Plan, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations required by the Act

Conducting reviews and analysis of the effectiveness of consumer satisfaction of:

- 4**
 - functions of the NC Department of Health and Human Services provided by the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities and other public and private entities responsible for providing services to individuals with disabilities
 - employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services, including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with such employment outcomes



OBJECTIVES

5 **Preparing and submitting an annual report to the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration and the Governor on the status of the vocational rehabilitation programs operating within the state and to make this report available to the public**

Coordinating with other state councils to avoid duplication of efforts and enhance the number of individuals served through participation in:

- 6**
 - the Statewide Independent Living Council
 - the advisory panel established under section 612(a)(20) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
 - the NC Council on Developmental Disabilities
 - the NC Mental Health Planning and Advisory Council established under section 1914(a) of the Public Health Service Act
 - the Workforce Development Planning Council, other public and private organizations, groups and functions

7 **Supporting the coordination and establishment of working relationships among the NC Department of Health and Human Services, the Statewide Independent Living Council, and Centers for Independent Living within NC**

8 **Performing other functions consistent with the purposes of the council and comparable to other functions performed by the council.**



STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2025

The Strategic Plan has four goals with corresponding strategies to guide quarterly meeting agenda creation and committee goals. An ad-hoc committee was appointed to rework Goal 4 in Sept., and members voted to approve the revised Goal 4 and corresponding strategies in Dec.

	GOAL	STRATEGIES
1	Increase marketing and outreach to individuals with disabilities, employers, and potential partners, including colleges and universities.	<div>a. Plan multi-faceted outreach to employers, potential clients and partners in coordination with other efforts.</div> <div>b. Leverage social media and other platforms to heighten awareness of EIPD and its services.</div> <div>c. Identify strategies with potential partners to promote EIPD as a potential career option.</div>
2	Honor people’s life choices by assuring that goals and service provision are consumer driven and focused.	<div>a. Review how EIPD is measuring casework quality and recommend new measures as appropriate.</div> <div>b. Review consumer satisfaction questionnaire to distinguish between experiences with EIPD versus contracted vendors.</div> <div>c. Monitor and evaluate performance on consumer satisfaction with their involvement in their Individual Plan for Employment</div>
3	Assist EIPD in attracting and retaining professional staff.	<div>a. Plan for multi-faceted outreach to employers, consumers and partners in coordination with division efforts.</div> <div>b. Draft a bill and submit to legislature with the goal of having the bill incorporated into the budget.</div> <div>c. Advocate for salary pay grades for counselors be aligned at the appropriate level by Human Resources.</div>
4	Assist EIPD in adapting to new trends in the marketplace.	<div>a. Promote telework, NCCareers, and NCWorks.</div> <div>b. Promote use of labor market information to align training with client goals and interests. Leverage Labor Market Information trends, workforce boards and employer relationships to connect clients to trending jobs.</div> <div>c. Promote training to help consumers advance careers.</div> <div>d. Develop new reporting requirement.</div>



COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The Council’s goal is to have greater impact on its mandates in the areas of community outreach, advocacy and SRC member development. To accomplish its goal, the Council designates SRC members as representatives to seven liaison groups, as well as other interest groups.

LIAISON GROUPS
Council on Education Services for Exceptional Children
NC Mental Health Planning and Advisory Council
NC Substance Use Disorder Federation
NC Council on Developmental Disabilities
NC Statewide Independent Living Council
NCWorks Commission
Commission for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services

ACTIONS
1 Identify candidates who can effectively liaise with the state councils to connect with key partners and facilitate strategic paths for community outreach, advocacy, and member development.
2 Exchange information to educate members about advocacy efforts within each sector.
3 Enable more stakeholders to participate in statewide and regional events by hosting on accessible virtual platforms.



COMMITTEES



Executive Committee

Acts on behalf of the council and is consistent with its purpose as outlined in its bylaws, being responsible for compiling the council's response to the Unified State Plan and triennial Comprehensive Needs Assessment, preparing the annual report, establishing meeting agendas, and setting the general direction of the council and its committees.

ACTIONS

1. To expand SRC participation in the development and implementation of the Unified State Plan, the committee addressed state plan development, implementation and progress toward SRC goals within the "Goals, Priorities and Strategies" section of the Plan during meetings with division director.
2. Advocated for strong leadership roles on the council and carefully reviewed membership terms. New members are encouraged to serve on designated committees to provide a more balanced representation.
3. Staff from NCDHHS Division of Human Resources were invited to speak at the spring full council meeting to discuss strategies to improve the processes for hiring and retention, especially for rehabilitation counselors.
4. The summer in-person meeting featured discussions with staff from the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Use Services (DMH/DD/SUS) and NC Medicaid on: cross divisional initiatives and the impact on providers and individuals.
5. The fall meeting featured a grants administrator from the NC Department of Transportation discussing the Elderly and Disabled Transportation Assistance Program and the Employment and Transportation Assistance.
6. The winter meeting included an update on HR issues around on-boarding of new employees, with notable improvements since the March meeting. Geological Solutions Inc., developers of the ENCORE case management system, joined to discuss challenges and improvements made to the system.
7. The committee remains hopeful that the budget expansion request for state EIPD matching funds will be approved during the short session. The SRC Chair recommended that Sharon Nellenbach serve another year, that Celeste Hunt remain Chair of Policy and Rules Review, and that Ping Miller

serve as Chair of Consumer Input and Public Outreach. Derek Burress volunteered to be the SRC Vice Chair. The council voted unanimously to support Michael Maybee as SRC Chair for another year and for Derek Burress as SRC Vice Chair Elect, effective January 1, 2025. Celeste Hunt and Ping Miller will remain as Committee Chairs.

8. In November, in the wake of Hurricane Helene, the committee felt it was important to hear about the Disaster Recovery Plans and the next steps to help vulnerable citizens in the western part of the state. Kenneth Bausell, Senior Director of Employment and Community Access, and Ginger Pasley, Senior Safety Officer, discussed the impacts of the disaster.



Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee

Reviews, analyzes and makes recommendations to the council regarding the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services delivered by the division and other public and private agencies in the state.

ACTIONS

1. Reviewed the current methods and strategies for monitoring consumer input and public outreach. The feedback has provided data results to track trends and themes.
2. The Consumer Input and Public Outreach Forum Planning Subcommittee reduced the frequency of meetings and contracted NC State University's McKimmon Center for technical support hosting the forums. The intention was to make each of these events a free-flowing conversation, with materials and related resources sent to registrants after the forum. The SRC assigned EIPD staff to respond to questions related to the division to ensure the accurate information was being presented.



Policy and Rules Review Committee

Reviews and makes recommendations relating to division policies and procedures that affect the public, and that are subject to public rule-making hearings under the state’s Administrative Procedures Act and required for compliance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

ACTIONS

1. Policy drafts reviewed and feedback provided on the following:

01-2024: FNS Allowable Net	Apprenticeships
Benefits Counseling	Counseling and Guidance
IPS Best Practices	Internships
International Residential Code Process	Voter Registration Volume I and Policy Directive 11-5-2024
Providing Extended Services for Youth with Disabilities	Flexibilities with Hurricane Helene
2. The Policy Team has been trending away from policies related to ENCORE and moving toward straightforward policies. For the Financial Needs Survey, there was a rate increase for Allowable Net Income for Poverty Guidelines. The rates in ENCORE with automated calculations went into effect on March 1, 2024. The number of cases that must be reviewed prior to promotion as an Independent Rehabilitation Counselor was reduced to seven from 20, effective March 1, 2024.
3. The Rehabilitation Services and Administration Monitoring Review resulted in several findings: EIPD should consider a long-term goal for potentially eligible individuals who transition to eligible with EIPD. There is a need for services such as internships, which must be under an Individual Plan for Employment. EIPD had to change its philosophy and policy on counseling and guidance because of the vague process and the need for the information to be available for others. The expectation is to provide counseling and guidance through a series of sessions and reflect it on the IPEs. There are clients who need additional support by providing extended services for youth with disabilities. There is no alternative funding for Extended Services. EIPD funds the upfront costs of providing job development, placement and training for individuals with the most significant disabilities. We partner with CRPs across the state to provide this very specialized service. Both historically and traditionally, there have

been other funding sources for Extended Services. If there aren’t funding sources available, the state agencies need to provide the funding the service for youth.

4. Vicky Miller, EIPD Chief of Policy gave a high-level overview of Internships to the SRC. There are three types: Traditional Internships, Supported Internships, and Employment First Internships.

Traditional Internships are structured work experiences that align with a client’s specific job goal. It is not random; it is targeted to enhance the vocational skills needed for the job goal. It cannot exceed 28 hours per week and is limited to the duration of 18 weeks for a total of 504 hours. There are exceptions if a business closes or if a client has a health issue and must stop for a while. EIPD pays the interns biweekly through a third-party fiduciary. EIPD also covers workers’ compensation if a client gets injured on the job. Interns are not eligible for unemployment.

Supported Internships provide up to 50% of job coaching support for individuals who need that extra support in addition to the oversight from a supervisor for an internship which is a form of support. The support targets population of consumers who need supported employment and more intensive job coaching support than is usual in Internships.

Employment First Internships align with Traditional Internships and are either occurring at EIPD offices, an independent living space or with other state agencies. Clients gain insight into state government and EIPD clients have become permanent employees.

5. Voter Registration requires a designated site coordinator at each location. There needs to be a back-up coordinator if the designated site coordinator is out of work due to illness or vacation. This is legally mandated. If voters do not take their registration forms with them to mail, it is up to the agency to submit the form within five business days.
6. After Hurricane Helene, service flexibilities allowed community access to be provided to impacted areas, similar to how the service was deployed during COVID-19 due to isolation. Counselors needed a mechanism to reach clients, and it also allowed CRPs and providers to bill for hours they spend helping people stay connected in their communities. The SRC Chair recommended that information be provided as part of new participant services before the next disaster is declared.



CONSUMERS SATISFACTION SURVEY

The consumer satisfaction survey is mandated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (the Act), which states that the SRC shall conduct a review and analyze the effectiveness of client satisfaction with:

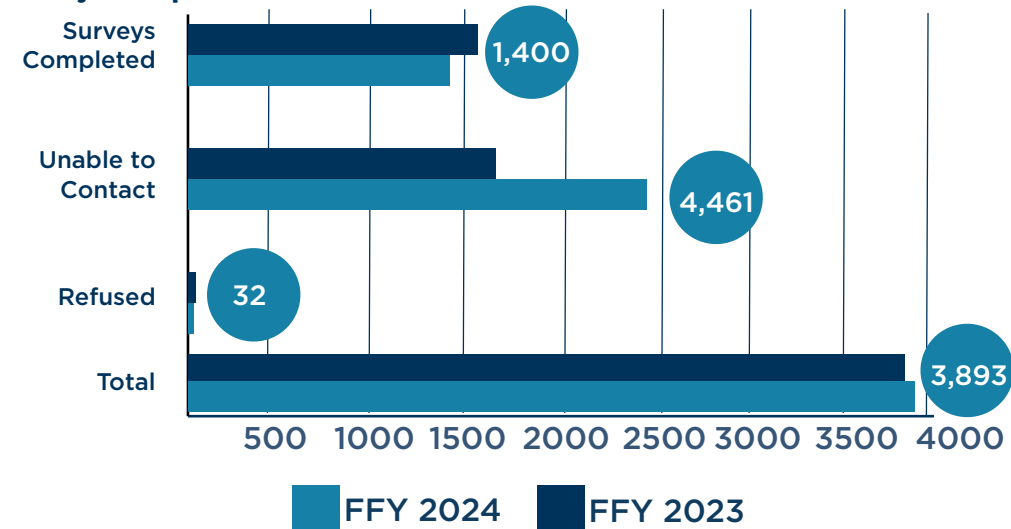
- The functions performed by the designated state agency
- VR services provided by state agencies, and other public and private entities responsible for providing services to individuals with disabilities under the Act
- Employment outcomes achieved by individuals receiving services under Title I of the Act, including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with those employment outcomes

SURVEY PROCESS

The survey is conducted by the SRC in cooperation with division staff. Council and staff share responsibility for analyzing and reporting the results.

The 2024 Client Satisfaction Survey was conducted by NC State University's Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services. Interviews were completed for 36% of the 3,893 EIPD clients sampled for the survey. This was consistent with the prior year in the proportion of completed interviews. The adjusted completion rate of 99.2% includes only clients that were contacted.

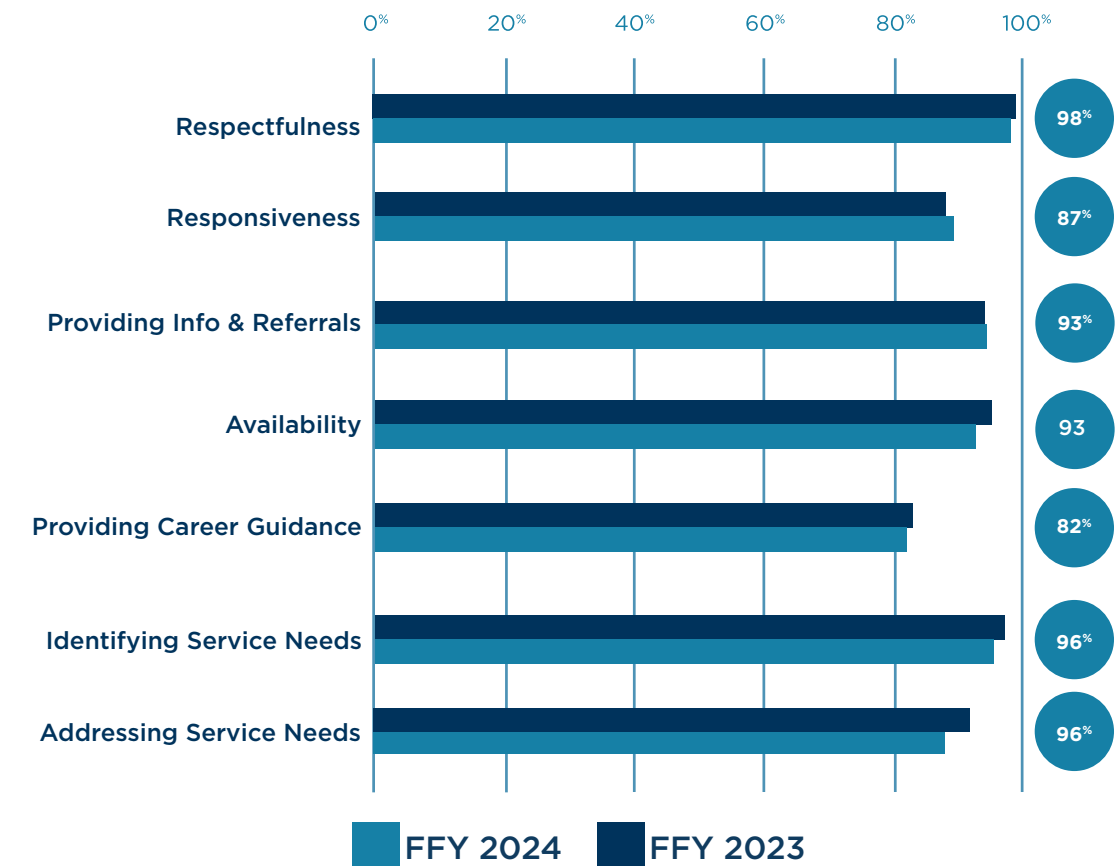
Survey Completion Results



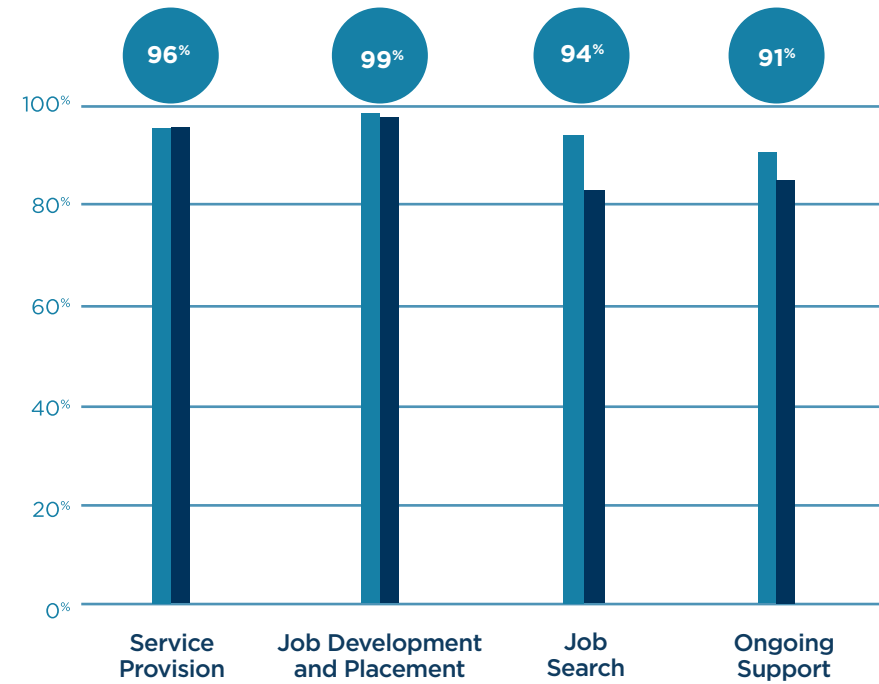
SECTION I

In 2024, overall satisfaction with EIPD counselors and other team members remained in line with the previous year, with slight improvements noted in most service-related items. The satisfaction rate was 86.8%, a one-point decline from last year, yet still within the margin of error.

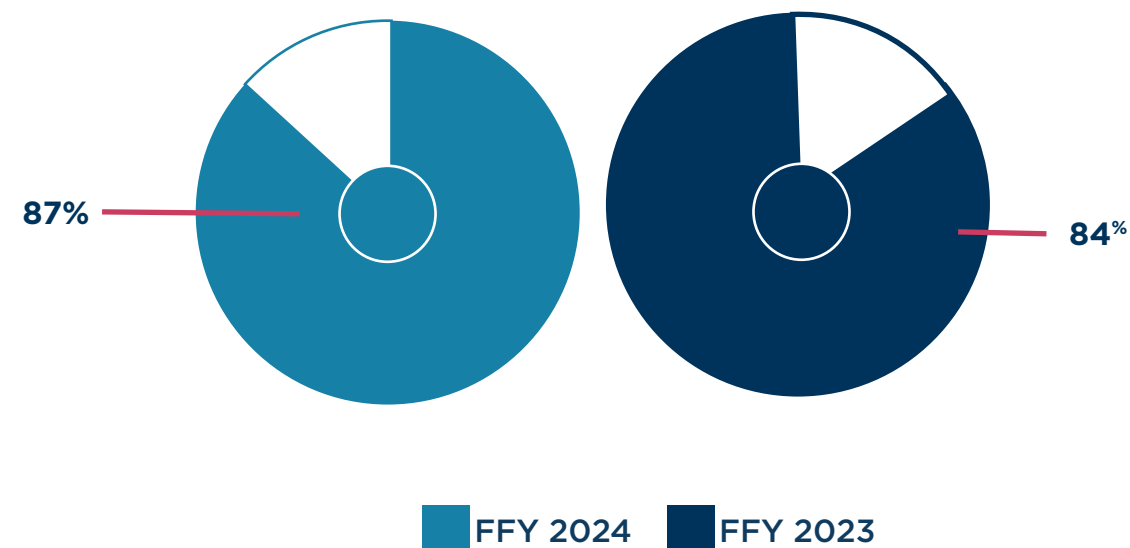
Satisfaction with Counselor and Staff



Satisfaction with Timeliness of Services



Satisfaction with Overall Experience

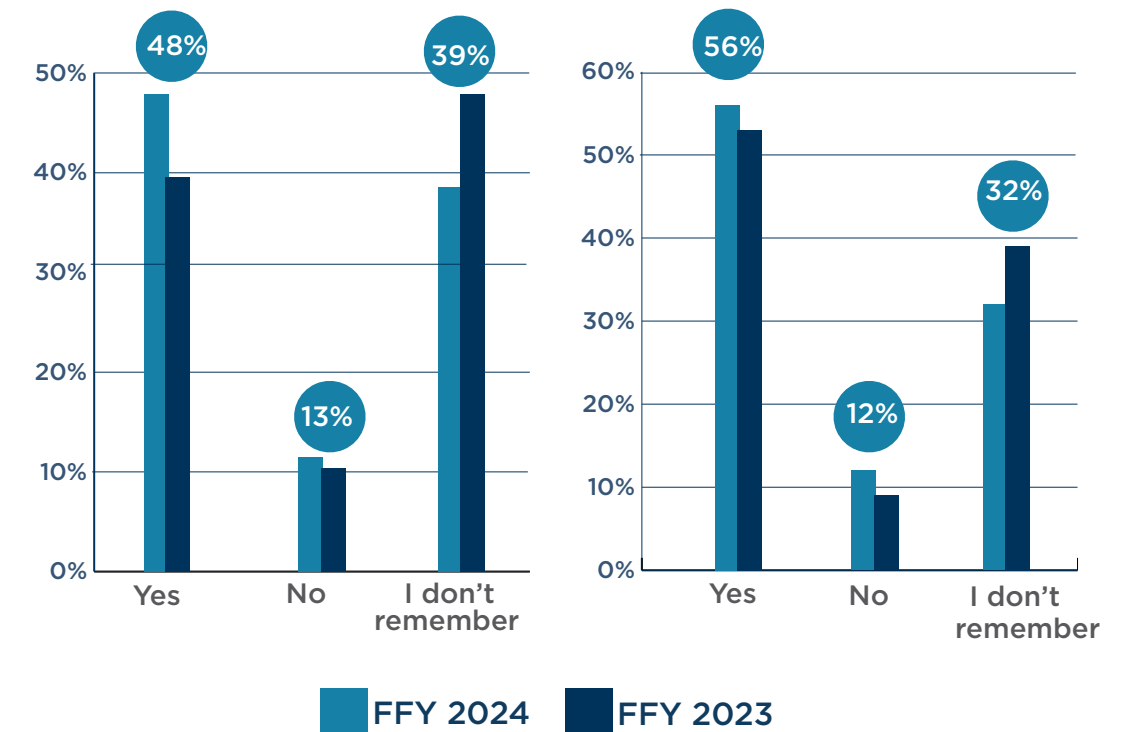


SECTION II

In the second section of the survey, the clients were asked whether their counselor informed them about the Client Assistance Program for addressing service-related concerns and about their right to appeal any agency decisions they disagree with. The response options are “yes,” “no,” or “I don’t remember.”

In 2024, there was an 8% increase in clients who reported that they learned about CAP. However, 1.2% more clients stated that they did not receive information, and 9.2% fewer responded “I don’t remember.”

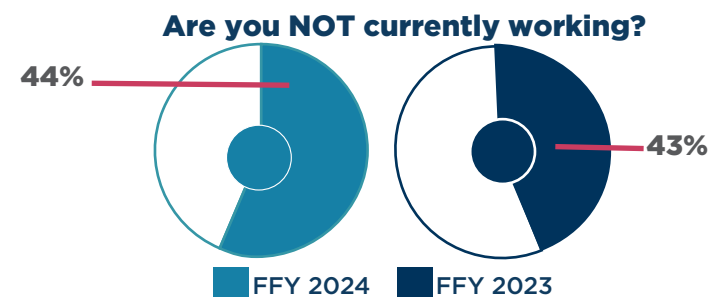
A similar trend appeared regarding the right to appeal: 3.9% more clients reported that they knew about the appeal, 2.9% more said they did not receive information about the appeal, and 6.8% fewer did not remember.



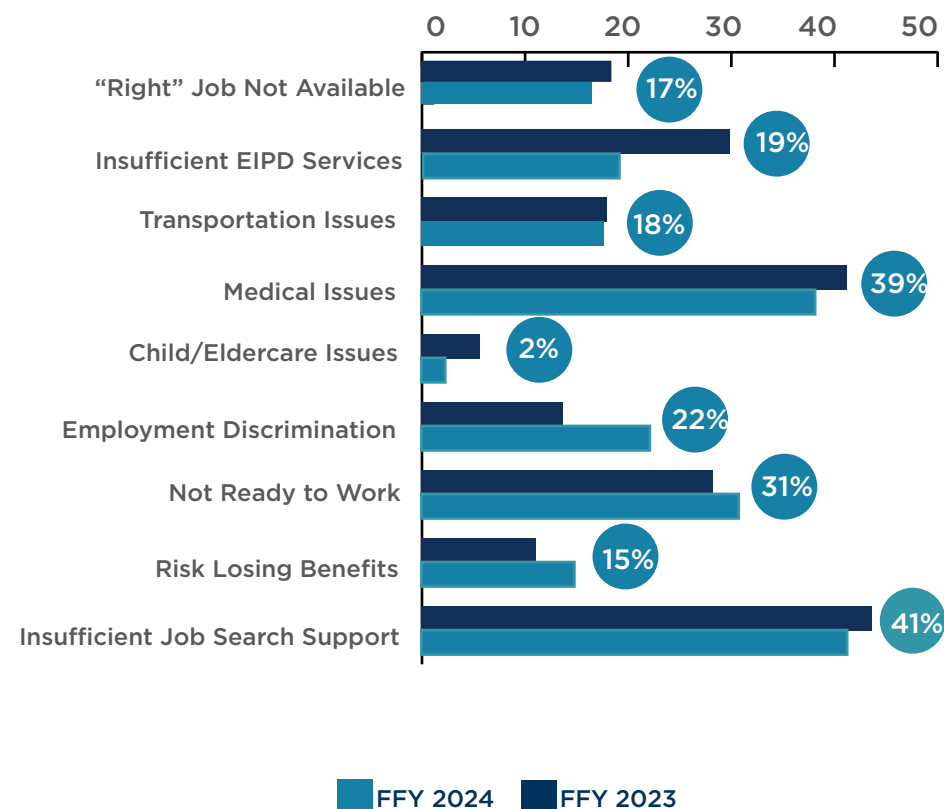


SECTION III

The third section of the survey asks the screening question of whether respondents were currently working. Those that indicated they were not working were then asked to answer nine sub-questions regarding barriers to employment. In FFY 2023, a little over half (56.8%) of the 1,363 individuals that responded to this question, answered they were not employed. These include clients with open EIPD cases progressing toward their goal, including clients who received job placement services, and former clients with recent case closures.



Barriers to Employment



PUBLIC FORUMS

In 2024, the SRC's Community Input and Public Outreach Committee hosted two virtual listening sessions and public forums focused on North Carolina's central and eastern regions. Due to the extensive damage to the western region from Hurricane Helene, the public forum originally planned for December was postponed until March 2025.

The virtual events were open to the public statewide. NCSU's McKimmon Center hosted the events on Zoom and handled production. The CIPD Forum Planning Subcommittee held after-forum meetings to discuss how to improve future forums based on feedback received during and after forum. The forums are recorded and posted on the division's website.

MARCH 21 PUBLIC FORUM

The March 21 public forum had 138 virtual attendees. Feedback included several suggestions.

- Provide more educational, career and job placement assistance
- Clarify the purpose of the forum and sharing success stories
- Institute a buddy system
- Clarify what services are being referred to EIPD and what is the expectation
- Explain next steps for clients when caseworker is unresponsive or client disagrees with a decision about their case
- Provide updates from EIPD about services in the area
- Provide more information about services and resources available for youth and students transitioning to adult status

Lessons learned included:

- Questions and answers should be blended with roundtable
- We need to share system/logistics upfront and then fold into questions and answers and when possible put them in separate groups
- Keep questions simple and distinct (3-5 minutes on narratives).
- When discussing meeting reminders, there is a time limit for each question
- Add to the introduction section the need to respect privacy, and remind presenter to refrain from sharing personal matters about individuals' cases
- Post the regional contacts earlier in the presentation

SEPTEMBER 12 PUBLIC FORUM

The September 12 virtual forum was focused on the eastern region, with 462 individuals registered and 115 in attendance. Using a panel format with multiple guests, attendees received a presentation and device demonstration from the NC Assistive Technology Program.

Feedback included:

- Gain more knowledge and information about EIPD
- Provide information for those who are graduating soon and are interested in finding a job
- Provide information about job opportunities and options
- Provide information about supported employment and Pre-ETS

Lessons learned included:

- Consider sister services, tailored plans and services within the local area
- Provide tips and frequently asked questions including abbreviations and terms
- Include flow charts for case escalation process
- Consider a forum on internships
- Highlight a service or specific programs
- Conduct pre- and post-surveys of regions to address precise concerns within that region
- Attendees appreciated the use of polls during presentations



RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Committee provided the following recommendations to the Division regarding goals, priorities or strategies.

1

In support of their strategic plan pertaining to increased marketing and outreach to individuals with disabilities, employers, and potential partners, including colleges and universities, the council recommended to conduct stakeholder listening sessions remotely with increased measures of outreach including mailed out invitations, email invites, and social media blasts to invite stakeholders to attend professionally coordinated virtual listening sessions to be held a minimum of three times per year.

The Division has supported all recommended adjustments and expansions to the methods of outreach, including increased frequency and expansion of outreach venues to potential clients and partners.

2

The council recommends improving the efficiency of the EIPD process through the exploration of ways to expedite the provision of consumer services, including client purchases; conduct reviews of process for increased efficiencies, explore ways to involve staff in identifying and addressing inefficiencies, and, in general, increase capacity to serve consumers who use English as a second language.

EIPD supports all components of this recommendation and is addressing them. The procedures for purchasing prosthetics and orthodontics have been improved. Ongoing work is being done to simplify the self-employment evaluation process to a feasible extent. Spanish language materials has increased the capacity in serving consumers who use English as a second language.

3

The council recommended that quarterly full council meetings contain a standing item for the Client Assistance Program to give an activity update. Further, the council recommended a standardized set of questions and topic areas for regional director and/or regional unit managers to provide updates for local activities, developments, or concerns for the council.

EIPD has incorporated the recommended changes and will continue with these standing topics until the council recommends further adjustments.

4

The council recommended to continue to jointly conduct consumer input sessions to be held a minimum of three times annually; collecting input from various communities across the state and to strongly encourage staff attendance at such sessions whenever possible.

EIPD will continue to actively support jointly conducted input sessions three times annually canvassing various communities across the state focusing on how the EIPD program is addressing consumers' EIPD needs through its service provision. This has been accomplished virtually since June 2020, and the Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee meets with division staff regularly to steadily improve and expand the means of accomplishing this.

5

Where as the council is concerned about providing responsive services to consumers and realizes the division's abilities in this area are impeded when high vacancy rates occur within the division. The council recommends that EIPD provide regular updates regarding key vacancies, including direct service positions such as counseling positions, so that the council may advocate appropriately as included within the council's current strategic plan.

EIPD supports this recommendation and will continue to work with council members to regularly provide updates through statewide and regional vacancy reports.

6

Where as the SRC Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee acknowledged decreasing response rates on client satisfaction self-administered written questionnaires, the council recommends that EIPD continue the use of the telephonic client satisfaction survey. Further, the Council recommends continuing the practice of surveying clients in active status to continue employing a weighted sampling method to maintain costs and ensure representation across disability types, minority status, age and gender.

The division supports this recommendation and will continue its adjusted sampling practices, contracts, and purchase orders accordingly.



MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

There was an orientation held on March 21, 2024, for new and existing SRC members. Members learned about the history of the council and how it was formed, as well as their role and responsibilities on the council.

Senior Director of Employment and Community Access Kenneth Bausell provided updates on Medicaid expansion, Inclusion Works, Work Together NC, Inclusion Connects and other relevant topics. He also informed the SRC about Medicaid Tailored Plans, supports for children and families, VR program funding, Individual Placement and Support Services, the Brain Injury Support Services program, Pre-Employment Transition Services and the Innovations waiver.

EIPD Director Kathie Smith presented at each quarterly meeting, discussing NCDHHS priorities, which include investing in behavioral health and resiliency, supporting child and family wellbeing, and building a strong and inclusive workforce. She also discussed the federal/state match for VR funding, where the federal government spends \$3.70 for every \$1 of state funds. In 2014, RSA began mandating that 15% of VR grant funding be spent on Pre-ETS and EIPD was placed under a-ETS Corrective Action Plan to ensure that it meets the expenditure goal. The previous year's state audit concluded with zero findings.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services officially changed its name to the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD) on April 23, 2024, hosting regional launch events at the State Office in Raleigh, at WorkSource East in Goldsboro, and at WorkSource West in Morganton. Toolkits were distributed to each office to support the transition at the local level. EIPD also launched its social media presence on Facebook.

Project Spark entered its second year with three pilot programs with: Wake Enterprises, Chatham Trades and Tri-County Industries. A new I/DD Peer Mentor Training was offered through a partnership with Community Bridges, with 10-12 participants enrolled in the first cohort. EIPD staffer Brendon Hildreth completed the training and is now a Disability Peer Consultant and will be piloting the Peer Mentorship as a service in the New Bern Office.

Disability Benefits 101 helps service providers and clients estimate how the income generated from employment will impact their state and federal benefits. A state-specific version of the site will go live in North Carolina on May 5, 2025. For the first time, the North Carolina hosted the National Association of Multicultural Rehabilitation Concerns (NAMRC) EIPD hosted a job fair at the event, which resulted in multiple applications for positions across the state. Next year, North Carolina is scheduled to host the Southeast Regional Rehabilitation Association Annual Training Conference and NAMRC has suggested partnering to host a larger conference in the fall of 2025. The conference will target all levels of EIPD staff, college and university students, provider agencies, advocacy groups, and anyone who does disability work or people with disabilities seeking employment.

The vacancy rate on September 1, 2024 was 24.9% overall, and 33.33% for rehabilitation counselors. Employees at lower compensation levels, received salary increases and retention bonuses. There were six to eight offices in each region which fell below 25% of vacancies. EIPD is looking into sign-on bonuses for recruitment; hosting hiring blitzes with universities; doing interviews and hiring prospects; decreasing the turnaround time on start dates, to include same week hiring; reducing red tape and requirements; and using Temporary Solutions employees to fill the gap. Field employees are eligible to telework two days per week, which has been a useful recruitment tool.

ENCORE is the case management system designed by Geographical Solutions Inc. (GSI). ENCORE Phase 1 has had quite a lot of challenges, including delayed payments to providers. The Fiscal Team worked with providers to have them apply to receive direct payments. There has been a concerted effort to refine ENCORE's functionality to increase efficiencies with ongoing training for EIPD staff. The list of ENCORE improvement priorities includes: GSI, 1) Payments 2) Overall system stability; and 3) Efficient workflow and streamlined data entry.

NC Medicaid's LaCosta Parker shared information about the 1959 waiver which was launching, with an effective date of July 1, 2024. 1959 Respite Care are "E" benefits which are transferred to "I" benefits. Presumptive Eligibility includes those previously served or eligible through other similar programs.

Ginger Yarbrough with DMH/DD/SUS reported on the Inclusion Works Initiative to expand opportunities for people with I/DD to achieve CIE.

EIPD Social Media Specialist Kaleigh Kemp presented about the newly launched social media presence on Facebook, along with planned expansion to LinkedIn and Instagram. The SRC recommended that the department have a preemptive plan in place to manage inappropriate feedback as opposed to dealing with as it comes about.

In September, Department of Transportation Grants Administrator Carolyn Freitag spoke about the Rural Operating Assistance Program, that is a state-funded program administered by the DOT's Integrated Mobility Division. Each county is allocated funding, regardless of size, but amounts will differ based on a funding formula. Of interest to the SRC are the Elderly and Disabled Transportation Assistance Program and the Rural General Public Transportation Assistance Program.

EIPD Chief of Employment Services and Program Development Anita McMahan met with SRC to discuss Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) services, including Supported Employment and Work Adjustment. There are 60 unique providers that deliver the services and, as of November 1, 2024, there were 85 contracts in place. Additionally, there are 10 Project SEARCH providers located across the state. McMahan also discussed Community-Based Assessments, which allow clients to participate in evaluation services, including informational interviewing, job sampling, job shadowing, and identifying their support needs. Community-Based Work Adjustment help people learn soft skills, job preparedness, and getting ready to go back to work. There are 15 Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Supported Employment providers and contracts statewide. Brain Injury Support Services is a more intensive type of supported employment that includes a cognitive training component, and there are two providers contracted to deliver these services. Currently, there are 28 Pre-ETS providers and EIPD hopes to increase that number. The new Supported Internship Service allows clients to gain work experience and better understand expectations if they have not worked before. EIPD's Fiscal Services team discussed improvements to ENCORE that will facilitate payments to CRPs and other service providers.

In December, Communications and Strategic Initiatives Manager Jeanna Cullinan provided updates on divisional and agency projects that she supports, including Employment First and Inclusion Works. She gave much more detailed information about the transition from DVRS to EIPD, the relaunch toolkit for local unit offices, which included guidance on key messages about the transition, and how to obtain new signage, logos, cards, presentation templates and backgrounds, flyers, and outreach.

EIPD’s Manager for Strategic Business Initiatives David Meaux gave an update on ENCORE, which has been in Phase I for the past 15 months. ENCORE System Usability Improvements have focused on workflow-process efficiency, reducing the number of clicks to complete tasks, addressing stability and performance concerns and improving the user experience.

ENCORE Phase II will bring in external users: providers, vendors, and clients, facilitating two-way information exchange with our partners. The Service Provider Portal enables both contracted and those that were not contracted, service providers to efficiently interact with EIPD’s business staff about business transactions or the progress status on service delivery reporting. The Client Portal will permit two-way interactions between clients, counselors, and business staff about status details of their case, service plans, and for facilitating remote Client/Guardian approvals and case progress reporting.

ENCORE Phase III is planned for 2026 to establish interoperability with other core systems: Department of Commerce – Workforce Information Database (WID), North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA), and other external system operability as needed. ENCORE’s contracted vendor, Geographic Systems, Inc., was represented by Group Lead Perry Panagopoulos, who shared information about recent enhancement to their system. GSI has expanded the team by 80%, hired six new developers over the last eight months and is working on bringing these staff members up to speed while pulling in existing teams that are seasoned to help. In addition, they should be picking up more developers over the next six months. Efficiency is one of their major focuses and ensuring system stability and that all the changes are ADA compliant.

Gloria Garton, Executive Director of the Statewide Independent Living Council (NCSILC), and Monique Stamps, NCSILC Policy and Outreach Director, shared information about the new State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) and their priorities for the next three years: 1) Affordable and Successful Housing; 2) Develop Youth Program; 3) Employment; and 4) Transition.

NCDHHS Senior Safety Officer Ginger Pasley discussed the state’s response and challenges faced with Hurricane Helene recovery efforts. The biggest challenge for EIPD was the lack of communication with our western region employees. A recommendation was made to create standard interventions to be activated during a public health emergency or disaster, including adding Community Access Service being included on IPEs, and creating guidance for transferring cases when someone is evacuated.

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Director Tania Bowers provided an update about the instability of the CAP database, which is used to track and report data to the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Bowers also shared information about how vacancies and new staff training needs have impacted the time required to resolve a client concern or achieve resolution in a case. With great effort, CAP is rebuilding and fortifying their current database to make it more stable. They are exploring at the possibility of getting a new database system.

Two years ago, Disability Rights North Carolina (DRNC) petitioned the governor to have CAP designated to them. The SRC supported CAP remain in the state. Traditionally, whenever there is a change in governors, or change with the Director of CAP, DRNC petitions to take over CAP. Tania asked for the SRC’s support in the event this happens. Members expressed their continued support for CAP.

EIPD’s Human Resources Business Partner Greg Chavez shared that NCDHHS HR is working to become more efficient in functional areas, like employee relations, benefits, class and compensation, talent acquisition and recruitment. He mentioned that there is only one recruiter currently working, which makes it difficult to manage the large number of vacancies throughout the department. Council members asked about a hiring blitz in the eastern region.



2023-24 SRC MEMBERS



Michael Maybee
SRC Chair,
Representing
Labor



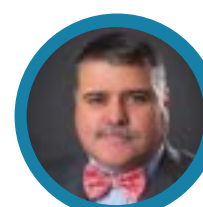
Emma Friesen
Representing
Disability
Advocacy Groups



Kelly Friedlander
Representing
Disability
Advocacy Groups



Clare Miller
Representing
Chamber of
Commerce



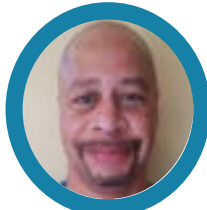
Derek Burrell
Vice Chair Elect
Representing
Disability Advocacy
Groups



Berlina German
NCWorks
Commission



Anne Monterosso
Representing
State Education
Agency



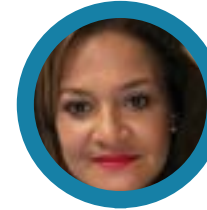
James Jones
Representing
Regional
Rehabilitation
Centers



Chelsea Pinneo
Representing
EIPD Consumers



Gloria Garton
Statewide
Independent Living
Council



Celeste Hunt
Director of
Projects Under
Section 121



Sharon Nellenbach
Representing
Business and
Industry



David Dyson
Representing
Disability
Advocacy Groups



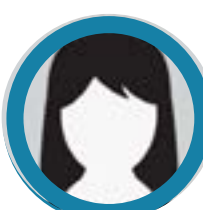
Yolanda Edwards
Representing
Non-Divisional
Rehabilitation
Counselors



Patrina Wims
Representing
EIPD (Non-Voting
Member)



Tania Bowers
Representing
Client Assistance
Program



Aparna Sudhini
Representing
Business and
Industry



Kathie Smith
Director of EIPD
(Ex-Officio
Member)



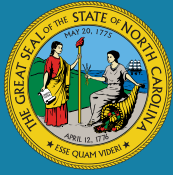
Beth Voll
Representing
Parent Training and
Information Centers



Doreen Byrd
Representing
Parent Training and
Information Centers



Tracey Craven
Representing
CRP Providers



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**
Employment and Independence
for People with Disabilities

NORTH CAROLINA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/eipd/councils>

2024 MEETING SCHEDULE

March 21-22

June 13-14

September 12-13

December 5-6

NCDHHS is an equal opportunity employer and provider. 6/24