

## IDENTIFYING WHAT PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES WANT AND NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EMPLOYMENT



People with disabilities should have access to information that is supported by research demonstrating that a practice or strategy is "evidence-based" and effective in supporting employment outcomes. However, what information do people with physical disabilities need? How can research findings be translated into practical information that they can use in their everyday lives? How should this information be disseminated? A review of the literature indicates that there is a growing body of knowledge on barriers to employment for people with physical disabilities and the supports needed to promote employment outcomes. However, it is less certain what people with physical disabilities know about these supports and services that can eliminate the barriers and facilitate employment.

Virginia Commonwealth University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (VCU-RRTC) on Employment of People with Physical Disabilities has been funded to establish a National Resource Center on Employment as part of its work scope. One of the Center's research studies will collect information on how individuals with physical disabilities have met the challenges associated with becoming employed. This includes learning more about the resources that they have used as well as the various barriers that they have faced. This research brief will provide a brief overview of the study and the research activities that will be conducted.

### Study Overview

The study will be implemented in three phases using a mixed methods research design. The first phase will involve conducting a series of focus groups for people with physical disabilities to discuss their work experiences. The data collected during the focus groups will be used to develop a survey for a national audience of people with physical disabilities for Phase Two. This survey will assist our researchers in selecting a KT strategy to disseminate information on employment. Phase Three will be a random control trial study that will test the efficacy of the KT strategies with people who have physical disabilities. All phases of the research will be conducted with five constituency groups who have various disabilities (e.g., arthritis, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury, and transition age youth with disabilities). The study is designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the most commonly reported barriers and facilitators to employment that are identified by people with physical disabilities? (Phase One and Two)



2. What are the most commonly reported employment information and resource needs reported by people with physical disabilities? (Phase One and Two)
3. What KT strategies are reported by people with physical disabilities as most useful / preferred for obtaining evidence-based research knowledge on employment? (Phase One and Two)
4. What is the relationship between demographics and the KT strategies used / preferred by people with physical disabilities to access evidence-based knowledge? (Phase Two)
5. What is the relationship between demographics and the information reported as needed by people with physical disabilities? (Phase Two)
6. Is the targeted KT strategy for each type of disability superior to the traditional strategy (control) for acquiring and using evidence-based research knowledge on employment by people with physical disabilities? (Phase Three)
7. What is the relationship between demographics (i.e., gender, age, functional limitations, & educational level) and the effective knowledge translation strategies for acquiring evidence-based research knowledge on employment by people with physical disabilities? (Phase Three)

## Phase One

During Phase One a series of 20 focus groups will be conducted with our five constituency groups. This will include individuals who are employed and unemployed. The World Institute on Disability (WID) is partnering with the RRTC to recruit participants. A total of 160 to 200 individuals with disabilities will be recruited with structured questions to guide the discussions. Our goal is to involve other organizations nationally to ensure that the voices of people with disabilities across disability groups, socio-economic backgrounds, educational backgrounds, and all levels of disability are represented.

A focus group is a qualitative research methodology that can be used to collect information on the views, opinions, and attitudes of a group of people. The group is asked for their feedback on a specific topic of interest. The benefit of conducting focus groups is that participants can listen to each other's comments, which may stimulate ideas and experiences. Individuals with physical disabilities may be isolated from others with similar experiences. The opportunity to participate in a group discussion on a common theme could provide rich data for the VCU-RRTC on which to build the resource materials needed to help these individuals achieve their employment outcomes.

All focus groups will be conducted over the phone lasting approximately 60-90 minutes each. Participants' confidentiality will be protected, and their names will never be published or disseminated. Any identifying information collected will be stored separately from any data collected. Transcripts will be produced from recordings of the phone conversations, but identifying information will not be included in the transcripts. The qualitative data gathered during these focus groups will be analyzed for themes leading to the development of a survey instrument that will be used during Phase Two of the research.

Some of the questions that will be asked of individuals who are unemployed include but will not be limited to:

- Tell me about your ideal job? What would you like to do?
- Give me an example of how your disability has made it difficult for you to find or maintain employment.
- Tell me an example of a service or support that was helpful.



- What supports and services (such as people, information, etc.) have you used to look for a job?
- Tell me an example of a service or support that was not helpful.
- How have your career choices been limited by your disability?
- What supports and services will you need to become employed?
- Where will you go to find these supports and services?

## **PHASE TWO:**

During Phase Two, a national survey will be completed reaching out to a larger sample to include a minimum of 2,000 individuals with physical disabilities. The survey will be developed using the information that was learned from an analysis of the Phase One focus groups. People with physical disabilities from our constituency groups will be recruited with the assistance of various national organizations representing these disability groups. The goal is to receive at least 500 responses. In addition to identifying the information and resource needs reported by people with physical disabilities, the research will be identifying preferred methods for obtaining and using this information and resources. The results of the survey will be used to guide the development and dissemination of resources to our target audiences as well as design a research study to test the effectiveness of a knowledge translation strategy.

## **PHASE THREE:**

During Phase Three of the study, we will recruit 300 individuals with physical disabilities from the five constituency groups to participate in a random control trial study. This phase will test the use of knowledge translation strategies to provide evidence-based employment information to individuals with physical disabilities. The number of studies to be conducted during this phase will be based upon the completion of Phase One and Two and data analysis. We intend to study the effectiveness of KT strategies, but these must be matched with the specific content and the preferred methods of our target audience. For instance, we may find that transition-age youth prefer / use different KT strategies than older adults. Therefore, it may be necessary to design different studies for our different audiences.

At this time, the proposed research will test the effectiveness of Facebook as one of the KT strategies to translate information to people with physical disabilities on employment. The 300 participants will be randomly assigned to one of two groups. One hundred fifty (30 x 5 groups = 150) individuals from each of the five constituency groups will be randomly assigned to the "Facebook" intervention. The remaining 150 will be randomly assigned to a group that will receive no intervention other than being provided the link to the Center's website. Anyone in these groups will be able to use the resources that are provided online via the Center's website. Data analysis will determine if there are any differences in the knowledge gained by the individuals receiving the Facebook intervention as opposed to the individuals who do not.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this study is to actively involve people with physical disabilities in the design, research, and on-going knowledge translation (KT) activities of the RRTC on Employment of People with Physical Disabilities. The Center wants to understand the experiences of people with physical disabilities when they have looked for employment including those things that have been barriers and those things that have facilitated employment. The results of this study will guide the training, technical assistance, and dissemination activities, specifically, the results will provide critical data on what individuals with physical disabilities need as far as resources and information on barriers and facilitators to employment.



**Summary:** The purpose of this study is to actively involve people with physical disabilities in the design, research, and on-going knowledge translation (KT) activities of the RRTC on Employment of People with Physical Disabilities. The Center wants to understand the experiences of people with physical disabilities when they have looked for employment including those things that have been barriers and those things that have facilitated employment. The results of this study will guide the training, technical assistance, and dissemination activities, specifically, the results will provide critical data on what individuals with physical disabilities need as far as resources and information on barriers and facilitators to employment.

The VCU-RRTC is interested in obtaining your feedback and support for this research. If you have questions or would like to discuss how you may be involved in this research, you may contact Dr. Katherine Inge, Project Director or Dr. Carolyn Graham, Research Director.

Information for this research brief was developed for the VCU-RRTC on Employment of People with Physical Disabilities. The authors for this issue are **Dr. Katherine Inge, Director** and **Dr. Carolyn Graham, Research Director**. Questions on this brief should be directed to Dr. Inge at [kinge@atlas.vcu.edu] or (804) 828-5956. For more information on the VCU-RRTC, please visit <http://www.vcurrtc.org>.

Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Employment of People with Physical Disabilities (VCU-RRTC) is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution providing access to education and employment without regard to age, race, color, national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, veteran's status, political affiliation, or disability. The VCU-RRTC is funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, grant #H133B130011.