

2023 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) Online Survey

Pursuant to 34 CFR 361.29(a), the Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services (IDHS-DRS) is mandated to conduct a comprehensive statewide needs assessment every three years. In 2023, IDHS-DRS committed to a large-scale study incorporating a variety of methods to ensure participation by people with disabilities across the state, including those from targeted communities and individuals with the most significant disabilities.

The Illinois Department of Human Service Division of Rehabilitation Services elected to subcontract the 2023 Satisfaction with Customer Service and the Needs Assessment Surveys. Both surveys were conducted concurrently using online methodology. Three customer groups (disabled persons, providers, and employers) were surveyed. More than 19,000 respondents between all three customer groups completed the survey, a stark increase from the 2018 needs assessment, where IDHS-DRS only collected 1,000 valid responses.

Based on feedback from all three customer groups, the top five responses from all three groups were scored and weighted by priority of each group. The already implied responses were added for a total weighted score of priorities. Below is the weighted priority order for all three groups:

1. Making the referral process easier
2. Virtual access to counselors
3. Online access to applications
4. Cross-training of staff on services provided by the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS)
5. Information about transition programs on DRS website
6. Better accessibility to other state workforce programs
7. Coordinating funding and staffing
8. Disability awareness training
9. Increased DRS presence in the Illinois Workforce Development Systems
10. Extended hours at in-person offices
11. Accessible equipment in Workforce Development Centers
12. Interpretation services for primary languages

The survey design incorporated feedback from collaboration with the Division of Rehabilitation Services State Rehabilitation Council (DRS-SRC) and a review of town hall meetings held by the Director of the DRS in 2022. The SRC indicated the following top priorities for the survey: statistically significant response rate, accessibility, readability, and translation into multiple languages. Analysis of the town hall transcripts revealed the following areas of concern: transportation, technology infrastructure, limited access to the DRS team, and the need for skills training.

Survey Respondents

Of the overall respondents,

- 84.9% were either a person with a disability (59.4% of overall respondents) or the parents or guardians of a person with a disability (25.6% of overall respondents).
- 15.1% of respondents break out as 12% as Disability Service Provider, Community Partnership Agency/Other, Teacher or Other Educational Professional, and 3% Employers.

The disabled customers ages ranged:

- 8.4% were 18 years of age or younger, and
- 17.7% were within five (5) years of retirement age.

Most respondents, 73.9%, will benefit from improvements in service in the next five years. The smallest age group(s) of disabled people responding were the three age ranges that include school-age students (Less than 14 years old, 15 to 16 years old, and 17 to 18 years old). Even combined these three populations only total 8.4% of the disabled respondents. 56% of respondents were female, while 42% were male, 1% non-binary, and 2% preferred not to say.

Disabled respondents reported identifying with:

- Physical disability affecting mobility, walking or standing (23%),
- learning disability (12%), Mental illness or Psychiatric disorder (12%),
- Cognitive or Intellectual disability (10%),
- Physical disability affecting use of arms or hands (10%),
- Chronic health conditions (10%), Autism or autism spectrum disorder (9%),
- Brain Injury or Stroke (5%),
- Blind or Visual impairment (4%), and
- Deaf or Hard of hearing (4%).

Respondents reported belonging to the following special groups:

- below Poverty level (31.3%),
- Student (30.8%),
- Senior Citizen (20.3%),
- LGBTQ (8.3%),
- Homeless (3.6%),
- Veteran (3.1%),
- Religious Minority (1.4%),
- Parolee re-entering workforce (0.8%), and
- Refugee or displaced individuals (0.6%).

Both the “Disabled” and “Provider” respondent groups identify the highest special population as “Below Poverty Level” with 31.3% and 20.8% respectively. Poverty creates an even greater need for employment support related to transportation and support services. The “Below Poverty Level” special population highlights the importance of collaborating with employers to develop quality employment opportunities that include a living wage and benefits.

The Division of Rehabilitation Services provides unbiased services to all special populations, age groups, gender, and disability types across the state of Illinois. However, the demographic data reveals a potentially disproportionate response to the survey which may indicate a disproportionate engagement with DRS based on demographics. From the demographics we learn that the African American population and the urban area demographic sector in Illinois access the 2023 Survey link at higher rates than other groups within the state. Of the survey respondents,

- 48% were white alone,
- 10% were Hispanic or Latino,
- 31% were Black or African American alone, and
- 11% reported “other”.

The top five languages by percentage of respondents were English (93.7%), American Sign Language (2.4%), Spanish (2.3%), Arabic (0.3%), and Polish (0.3%). It is positive that the Division provides services to minority groups typically underserved.

An overwhelming majority of respondents in all groups reported living, working, or employing disabled persons in Cook County. All counties had at least one (1) disabled person or their parent participate in the survey. However, seventy-seven counties remained underrepresented. Twenty-five (25) counties represented 80% of the Disabled Person/Parents of Disabled Person respondent groups, with Cook County representing 44% of total overall respondents and 55% of the highest responding counties (80% of overall counties). The county of residence is important to align disabled workforce growth with the Economic Development Regions to ensure equitable access to workforce opportunities.

Knowing the location of your advocates and navigators for workforce resources, training, and support is foundational to customer service.

- Thirty percent (30%) of total Disabled or Representative Disabled respondents (~3000) report not knowing the name of the DRS office responsible to help them navigate services and overcome roadblocks.
- Fourteen percent (14%) of total Provider respondents (counselors, educators) report not knowing the DRS office assigned to their customers.
- Eighteen percent (18%) of Employer respondents report not knowing the DRS office that would provide them or their employees employment support services.

Satisfaction with Customer Service

The key indicator question, “Overall, how happy are you with the employment support provided by the Division of Rehabilitation Services?” was asked of all three customer groups. The Customer Service Results were overall positive.

- 47.8% of respondents were either extremely or somewhat happy,
- 26.5% were neither happy nor unhappy, and
- 25.7% were somewhat or extremely unhappy with the employment support provided by DRS.

Overall, respondents feel positively toward the services received by the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS). Respondents indicated they like the services received.

Needs Assessment

The Needs Assessment evaluates the effectiveness of programs within the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) for the state of Illinois as reflected within the WIOA mission statement. The survey organizes data into the service areas within the WIOA Mission statement: Employment Programs, Education Services, Training Programs, and Support Services. The survey also evaluates the communication and operational strengths of DRS. The survey assesses gaps in current services by asking the three customer groups (disabled, providers, and employers) how well these three program areas met their needs. The three response options were: “Did more than expected”, “Did a good job for me”, and “Did not meet my needs”. The overall understanding of DRS programs and specific terminology by the three groups surveyed is unknown. The difference in interpretation of terms likely impacted the survey, therefore providing skewed results.

Strengths

The Satisfaction for Customer Service and Needs Assessment Survey revealed many DRS strengths. Of the highlights are the

- strong Division leadership,
- strong and supportive State Rehabilitation council,
- mature data sets tracking performance measures,
- well-developed pre-employment transition services, and
- strong engagement by the Black/African American minority group.

Opportunities for improvement

Overall, the Satisfaction for Customer Service and Needs Assessment Survey revealed many opportunities for improvement for the DRS. In general, the DRS could

- increase engagement with the Hispanic/Latinx minority group,
- implement a formal Customer Service program,
- engage and measure performance of the Senior Disabled “special population”, and
- assess workflows and staffing numbers.

Specific recommendations for each of the four categories emphasized in the WIOA mission statement are outlined below.

Employment Programs.

Disabled customers and their parents, providers, and employers identified improvement in Self-employment as their top priority. Additionally, employers need help identifying and incorporating into their business plans quality employment opportunities for people with disabilities, especially “earn while you learn” training options.

Education Services.

Needs Assessment recommendations improvements in the Pre-Employment Transition Services (PTS) programs. Based on the age ranges of survey respondents, it is important to remember that any improvements made in the PTS programs while positively impacting future students, will leave gaps for the students who have graduated or aged out before the improvements were initiated. Therefore, for the populations who aged out or completed the high school credentials, it is important to focus improvements on continuing education, training programs, and employment programs that can positively impact the measurable skill gains to fill the needs created by any gaps in services identified by the current student group.

Training Programs.

Providers and Employers reported “Work-based learning- Employer paid work experiences: Learning while earning money at a job” was one of the top three keys to success for the disabled persons, both the Disabled Persons and the Provider groups reported “On-the-job Training: Learning a job while getting paid to work” as a high priority area that DID NOT meet their needs. Increasing “earn while you learn” programs, such as paid work-based learning experiences and on-the-job training opportunities is considered a priority opportunity for improvement.

Support Services.

Both disabled and provider respondent groups identified the following priorities for needed improvements in the “Support Services” area:

1. **Transportation:** Help getting from home to school or work.
2. **Benefits Planning Services:** Help to manage Social Security Benefits and plan to begin working.
3. **Assistive Technology Services and Support:** Special Equipment and electronic devices to help with reading, speaking, or using a computer.

Summary:

Overall, respondents feel positively toward the services received by the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS). Respondents indicated they like the services received. However, the demographic data reveals a potentially disproportionate response to the survey which may indicate a disproportionate engagement with DRS for services based on race demographics. The Satisfaction with Customer Service Survey greatest learning is the largest percentage of all respondent populations were not aware of which DRS office aided them in obtaining disability services and support and the corresponding relationship to lower satisfaction scores.

The Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services is poised for success. The recent reorganization demonstrates a commitment to change. The focus on statistics for good business decisions confirms a commitment to accountability. The collaboration between the Director and the State Rehabilitation council exhibits dedicated leadership. Strong leadership at the Director level with the help of a supportive State Rehabilitation Council can take the services to the disabled workforce to the next level.