

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

99% of autistic adults get no public employment services

Researchers linked nine years of national Medicaid and Vocational Rehabilitation records. Almost nobody who needed employment support appeared in either system, and Medicaid was spending less at the end than at the start.

PILLAR: WHY | COMPANION TO BLOG POST B142 | 2-PAGE BRIEF

99%

RECEIVED NOTHING

Of working-age autistic adults who likely needed employment services.

How the finding was built

TWO SYSTEMS, ONE GAP

STAGE 1

Two systems, one job

Medicaid waivers and state Vocational Rehabilitation are the only public routes to employment support at scale. There is no third door.

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STAGE 2

Count who got in

In 2016, about 4,200 autistic people received Medicaid employment services. Nearly 18,000 received Vocational Rehabilitation services.

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STAGE 3

Compare to who needed it

Against a population of about 5.4 million autistic adults, that is 1.1% served and roughly 1.98 million left out.

Medicaid against Vocational Rehabilitation

2008 TO 2016

The two public systems, side by side

The system that grew is the one designed to close your case. The system that shrank is the one designed to stay. That is the whole finding in one table.

MEASURE	MEDICAID	VOCATIONAL REHAB
People served	About 4,200 autistic people in 2016	Nearly 18,000 autistic people
Spending trend	Decreased by almost 30%	Grew by nearly 400%
Design intent	Ongoing, long-term support	Time-limited, closes on success
Access route	Waiver slot, often a waiting list	Direct application by the adult
What ends it	Losing the waiver slot	Successful closure, a federal measure
Fit for Level 3	Right system, capped supply	Wrong clock, open door

1.98M

Autistic adults left without support

That is the 99% in the headline. It is a count, not a rhetorical flourish.

1.1%

Received employment services

From either public system, across the full nine years studied.

5.4 million

Autistic adults in the United States

The denominator. It grew every year of the study period.

THE SYSTEM THAT CLOSSES YOUR CASE

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Ray got a VR counselor at 21, a job coach for four months, and a case closure letter at 22 marked successful. He lost the job in week six of month five. There was no Medicaid employment slot to fall back to. Successful closure is a federal performance measure. It is not a description of Ray’s life.

TWO SYSTEMS. ONE OF THEM WAS BUILT TO LET GO.

THE TAKEAWAY

TURN THE PAGE

Vocational Rehabilitation is the system that grew, and it is the one an adult can apply to directly without waiting for a waiver slot. Apply to both. The data says only one of them is likely to answer.

How to open a Vocational Rehabilitation case, what to bring to intake, and what to do when both systems say no in writing.

Getting into the system that is growing

APPLY TO BOTH, EXPECT ONE

APPLY

Open a VR case in writing

- ☐ Request an application from your state VR agency
- ☐ Ask for the assigned counselor name and email
- ☐ Put the application date in writing and keep it
- ☐ Ask for the eligibility decision in writing
- ☐ Federal rules give VR 60 days to decide

BRING

What intake actually needs

- ☐ Diagnosis paperwork and recent assessments
- ☐ The most recent IEP and transition plan
- ☐ Any functional or vocational evaluation
- ☐ A written list of accommodations that work
- ☐ Two copies of everything, always

ASK

Questions for your CMH

- ☐ Does the waiver include employment services?
- ☐ Which providers currently have capacity?
- ☐ How many units are authorized right now?
- ☐ How many of those units were delivered last month?
- ☐ Put every answer in email, not on the phone

ESCALATE

When both systems say no

- ☐ Request the denial as a written notice
- ☐ Request administrative review of the VR denial
- ☐ File a local appeal of the Medicaid determination
- ☐ Send both written denials to your legislator
- ☐ Keep every denial forever, even old ones

BRING ONE PAGE, NOT A BINDER

The employment support one-pager

01

Who they are

Name, age, diagnosis, support level, and how they communicate.

02

What they can do

Specific repeatable tasks, observed, with the conditions they need.

03

What support costs

Hours of coaching required, and who is currently funding them.

04

What has failed

Prior placements, why they ended, and what was missing.

YOUR MOVE

When neither system will serve your adult child

1

Apply in writing

A verbal discouragement cannot be appealed.

2

Demand a decision

VR generally has 60 days from application.

3

Get the denial

In writing, with the reason stated.

4

Appeal both

VR administrative review, Medicaid local appeal.

5

Send it up

Two written denials make a legislative letter.

The study says 1.98 million families could write this letter. Almost none of them do. That is the only part of this you control.

SOURCES

Roux AM, Shea LL, et al. Unrealized Cross-System Opportunities to Improve Employment and Employment-Related Services Among Autistic Individuals. *The Milbank Quarterly*. 2023. A.J. Drexel Autism Institute.

Drexel University. Nearly 99% of Autistic Adults Not Receiving Public Employment Services in the U.S. News release, August 2023.

U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration. State Vocational Rehabilitation agency directory and program regulations, 34 CFR Part 361.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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