



What does it mean to have a disability in Colorado?

Employment

The issue of employment is paramount to any discussion concerning what it means to have a disability in Colorado. The employment status of an individual with a disability is often a very good indicator of the level of self-sufficiency and social integration experienced by that person. Increasing the level of employment for working-aged individuals with disabilities is integral to eliminating the barriers that often inhibit inclusivity, independence and self-fulfillment. Therefore, evaluating current employment data for individuals with disabilities provides us a helpful barometer in establishing how well our state is doing towards this goal.

When evaluating the employment figures listed below, it becomes apparent that individuals with disabilities in Colorado are doing markedly better in terms of employment than is typical for the nation as a whole. That being said, the employment data also indicates that individuals with disabilities across our state continue to lag far behind individuals without disabilities.

- 52.9% of people with disabilities in Colorado have difficulty working at a job because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition.
- The employment rate for individuals with disabilities in Colorado is 43.5%, 7.6% higher than the national employment rate for people with disabilities at 35.9%.
- According to the most recent data, there are 146,298 individuals with disabilities in Colorado employed and 190,111 unemployed.
- The employment rate for Colorado residents with disabilities is 40.3% lower than the employment rate for residents without disabilities (43.5% compared to 83.8%).
- Across the state, the employment rate for individuals with disabilities living in urban settings is 43.6% and 42.9% for individuals living in rural settings.¹
- In 2008, the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation assisted 2,463 individuals with disabilities in finding competitive employment, leading to an increase in Colorado's tax base of \$33 million.²

Undoubtedly, Colorado has come a long way in terms of furthering the employment opportunities available for individuals with disabilities. However, it is crucial that the state continue to pursue new avenues to further employ individuals with disabilities. Through employment, individuals with disabilities become less dependent on publicly funded services, receive less money in Social Security Disability and other government benefits, and become tax-payers and consumers. The long-term economic health of Colorado requires the full participation and contributions of all residents of our state.

¹ Information for the first six bullet points was found in: Houtenville, Andrew. (Sept. 2009). Statistics Describing Population with Disabilities in Colorado: By County and CIL Catchment Area. *Colorado SILC*. Retrieved Dec. 15, 2009, from <http://www.coloradosilc.org/default.htm>.

² The Colorado State Rehabilitation Council and the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. (n.d.). 2008 Annual Report. *Colorado Department of Human Service*. Retrieved Dec. 15, 2009, from http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/dvr/hm_information.htm.