

# National Disability Employment Awareness Month

*October 2022*

## Blog By Nicole LeBlanc

*Advisory Group Coordinator,  
National Center on Advancing Person-  
Centered Practices and Systems*



October was National Disability Employment Awareness Month. This year's theme is "Disability is part of the Equity Equation." As businesses adopt more Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, it is critical that they include people with disabilities. It is especially important to include those with the most significant disabilities in DEI initiatives as they are often left behind in society. Many businesses and society are working towards eliminating racial inequities and this is an opportunity to also work towards disability equity.

Our nation is dealing with a massive workforce shortage. At the same time, the rate of unemployment for people with disabilities is double the national average.<sup>1,2,3</sup> One of the easiest solutions to the worker shortage to hire people with disabilities. Hiring people with disabilities has many benefits, including:

1. Lower hiring and training costs.<sup>4,5</sup>
2. Boost morale while lowering the bottom line.
3. Fewer sick days taken by people with disabilities than the public.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [National Snapshot of Adults with Intellectual Disabilities in the Labor Force \(specialolympics.org\)](https://specialolympics.org)

<sup>2</sup> [Removing Obstacles for Disabled Workers Would Strengthen the U.S. Labor Market - Center for American Progress](#)

<sup>3</sup> [People with disabilities face challenges looking for jobs \(mynews13.com\)](https://mynews13.com)

<sup>4</sup> [4 Reasons Why Hiring People With Disabilities Is Good For Your Business - Recruitment Juice](#)

<sup>5</sup> [10 Reasons to Hire People with Disabilities | Achieve Services, Inc.](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Busting Myths About Hiring People with Disabilities | HuffPost Contributor](#)

4. Potential for higher revenue and higher profits.<sup>7</sup>
5. Showing a commitment to diversity.
6. Less staff turnover, particularly in entry level jobs.<sup>8</sup>
7. Federal and state tax credits.
8. Offering jobs for everyone. Too often people with disabilities are defined by what they cannot do rather than what they can do.
9. Creative problem solving.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a mass disabling event. This is partly because of long COVID, which affects about 1 in 5 COVID survivors.<sup>9</sup> Long COVID can cause chronic health issues including autoimmune diseases.<sup>10,11</sup> Put simply, an autoimmune disease is when your immune system is overactive.<sup>12</sup> This causes damage to things in the body like the nervous or digestive systems.<sup>13</sup> Examples of autoimmune diseases are colitis, Crohn's disease, and fibromyalgia. We are currently seeing the impact of long COVID as people drop out of the workforce.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to bust myths about people with disabilities and employment. For example, the myths that accommodations are expensive, that people with disabilities are more likely to sue, and that people with disabilities are less productive than non-disabled workers. Here are some ideas for the nonprofit sector and disability organizations to champion the inclusion of disability in all DEI initiatives:

1. Adopt disability hiring quotas. For example, aiming to have more than 25% of your staff made up of people with disabilities and people of color.
2. Draft job descriptions in a way that attracts a diverse pool of applicants.

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<sup>7</sup> [Benefits to hiring people with disabilities | Employee Benefit News](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Hiring People with Intellectual Disabilities \(shrm.org\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [New Study Says Post-COVID Health Problems Affect 1 in 5 Adult Survivors | NorthShore](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Mounting evidence shows autoimmune responses play a significant role in long Covid \(nbcnews.com\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Cureus | Severe Ulcerative Colitis as a Complication of Mild COVID-19 Infection in a Vaccinated Patient](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Autoimmune Diseases: Types, Symptoms, Causes & More \(healthline.com\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> [What Are Common Symptoms of Autoimmune Disease? | Johns Hopkins Medicine](#)

<sup>14</sup> [New data shows long Covid is keeping as many as 4 million people out of work \(brookings.edu\)](#)

3. Embrace job carving, often known as customized employment. Job carving can promote efficiency in a business while also creating jobs based on the strengths and talents of people with disabilities.
4. Adopt job sharing options where full-time roles are split into two part-time roles.
5. Embrace flexibility. Consider remote work opportunities and flexible work weeks.
6. Train staff on implicit bias and cultural competence.
7. Create a culture where everyone can feel safe being “out of the closet” regarding disability, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, mental health, and other identities.
8. Many states also have Medicaid Buy-In programs which allow people with disabilities to work and keep Medicaid.<sup>15</sup>

There is no time like the present to commit to hiring people with disabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities and other minorities. If we cannot use this opportunity, when can we expect to do it?

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<sup>15</sup> [Medicaid Buy-In Opens Doors to Employment for People with Disabilities | ACL Administration for Community Living](#)

## Resources

[Disability: Part of the Equity Equation | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#)

[Celebrate National Disability Employment Awareness Month \(NDEAM\) \(whatcanyoudocampaign.org\)](#)

[sabe\\_EF\\_2018.pdf \(sabeusa.org\)](#)

[Building Our Own Career Pathway: A Self-Advocate's Perspective | Disability Employment TA Center \(aoddisabilityemploymenttcenter.com\)](#)

[Why Employment Matters: A Resource Guide by and for Self-Advocates Interested in Pursuing Competitive, Integrated Employment \(aoddisabilityemploymenttcenter.com\)](#)

[Disability-Employment-Policy-101-Guide-By-Nicole-LeBlanc.pdf \(selfadvocacyinfo.org\)](#)

[Now Is the Time to Fix the Barriers to Disability Employment \(themighty.com\)](#)

[Getting to Work with Nicole LeBlanc – Firstperson Services](#)

[2022 National Survey Provides Insights into Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on Supervisor Perspectives: Comparing the Workplaces of 2022 and 2017 \(yahoo.com\)](#)

[Long COVID Appears to Have Led to a Surge of the Disabled in the Workplace - Liberty Street Economics \(newyorkfed.org\)](#)

[Workers with disabilities are struggling to get jobs even in tight labor market \(axios.com\)](#)

[\(214\) CDCI Connects on supporting employment for people on the autism spectrum - YouTube](#)

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NCAPPS is funded and led by the Administration for Community Living and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and is administered by HSRI. Visit us at [ncapps.acl.gov](https://ncapps.acl.gov).

