



COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

OVR

IN COLLABORATION WITH
THE CNMI OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
& THE CNMI STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

2020 COMPREHENSIVE STATE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

REPORTED FISCAL YEARS 2017 - 2019
MARCH 31, 2021

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The comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) conducted on behalf of CNMI's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) was an effort made possible through the orchestrated collaboration on of the CNMI disability community.

The following individuals were instrumental in providing guidance, data, and support that resulted in the final production of the needs assessment:

- Arlene Reyes, OVR Acting Director
- Tiava To'omata, OVR Planner
- Magdalene P. Reyes, OVR Data Analyst
- Lourdes Atalig, OVR Fiscal Officer
- Jane Tudela, VR Counselor
- Maryann Borja-Arriola, Former OVR Director

The following stakeholders gave their time, talents, and thoughts through participation in focus groups and survey instruments:

- CNMI Private and Public Sector Employers
- CNMI Disability Network Partners
- Members of the State Rehabilitation Council
- Members of the State Independent Living Council
- OVR Administrative and Counseling Staff

Much of the 2020 CSNA was based on frameworks, protocols, and procedures provided to OVR in the 2017/2018 CSNA by San Diego University. The current project team thanks past researchers for their contributions that provided continuity in data reporting.

And lastly, the contributions of OVR clients and individuals with disabilities through participation in paper surveys, online surveys, and focus groups are the lifeblood of this report. Because of their contributions speaking on behalf of the disability community, progress will be made to help individuals with disabilities follow their dreams and become self-reliant in the CNMI.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction.....	9
Methodology	11
Community Assessment and External Impacts.....	23
Section 1: OVR General Performance.....	26
<i>Recomondations for OVR General Performance</i>	56
Section 2: Vocational Rehabilitation Needs of Identified Communities	58
Part A: Those with Most Significant Disabilities, Including Their Need for Supported Employment.....	59
<i>Recommendations for Individuals with Most Significantly Disabilities</i>	70
Part B: Unserved or Underserved Populations.....	71
<i>Recommendations for Unserved and Underserved Communities</i>	78
Part C: Youth with Disabilities in Transition.....	81
<i>Recommendations for Youth and Students with Disabilities in Transition</i>	92
Part D: Individuals with Disabilities Served Through Other Components of The Statewide Workforce Development System (WIOA)	94
<i>Recommendations for WIOA</i>	97
Section 3: Community Rehabilitation Programs Within the CNMI.....	99
<i>Recommendations for Community Rehbailitation Programs</i>	100
Section 4: Needs of Employers and Businesses.....	101
<i>Recommendations for Employers and Businesses</i>	111
VII. Conclusion	113
Appendix A: Individual Survey.....	114
Appendix B: Focus Group Protocols	120
References	126

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), and Max Impacts: Maxine Laszlo Consulting conducted a comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) of the vocational rehabilitation needs of persons with disabilities within the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The purpose of the CSNA was to identify the current needs of individuals with disabilities and offer recommendations for OVR to consider in adjusting its programming and resource allocation to address these needs. A triennial needs assessment is required by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The CSNA intends to inform the Unified State Plan developed by the core partners in CNMI's Workforce Development System.

Data required by WIOA was gathered and analyzed for the 2020 CSNA. A summary of trends for each section of data required is listed below. The extensive analysis of data, observations, and recommendations can be found in the full report:

Section One: OVR General Performance

Recurring themes in section one include:

- *OVR has improved services for current and past clients, with clients noting very few barriers to accessing OVR resources and satisfaction with overall services provided.*
- *OVR is processing casework and moving consumers through the V.R. process well within the established time frames.*
- *There is still community confusion amongst potential clients, current clients, community partners, and businesses/employers on the array of*

OVR services provided and eligibility for services, which was also present in the 2017/2018 CSNA.

- *As numbers of clients increase due to COVID-19 and community impacts, hiring more OVR counselors would best serve clients.*
- *Rehabilitation rates remain lower than the national average, and several factors may be contributing to low rehabilitation rates.*
- *Community external economic and disaster-related factors may play a prominent role in varying data reports, availability of services, and speed of procurement processing. However, increased communication between OVR staff and clients has minimized frustrations experienced due to external factors.*

Section Two: Vocational Rehabilitation Needs of Identified Communities

Recurring themes in section two include:

- *OVR has increased in counseling services to those considered underserved and unserved in remote locations.*
- *OVR faces barriers in providing services to some subsections of marginalized communities due to external factors such as eligibility requirements for grant programs and limited resources for specific demographics.*
- *OVR has limited resources but is faced with increasing demand to provide disability-related services. To bridge the gaps in services caused by external factors, OVR could increase its bandwidth by leveraging hiring additional staff for both counseling and administration and leverage the resources of disability network partners.*

Part A: Those with Most Significant Disabilities, Including Their Need for Supported Employment

- *Changes to the supported employment (S.E.) eligibility have affected OVR's ability to expend S.E. funds.*
- *OVR consumers indicated "loss of SSI or SSDI funding" did not rank highly as a barrier to employment; however, disability network partners and OVR staff shared this was still a challenge for many.*
- *There are not enough local vendors or specialized professionals to meet the assistive technology, personal attendant, and interpreter needs for those with the most significant disabilities.*

Part B: Unserved or Underserved Populations

- *Federal regulations limit OVR's ability to expend funding in specific programs to support non-U.S. citizens, a sizeable percentage of the CNMI population.*
- *Tinian and Rota clients are experiencing more consistent communication from OVR caseworkers, thus reporting satisfaction with services.*
- *Data indicates that individuals with mental disabilities are underserved.*
- *Focus groups indicate that veterans may be underserved.*
- *Survey data indicates that individuals who do not communicate verbally using English are potentially underserved populations.*
- *The high cost of assistive technology and the availability of locally sourced products are barriers to meeting the needs of those with the most significant disabilities.*

Part C: Youth with Disabilities in Transition

- *The need for training regarding soft skills, work skills, job readiness, and programs to increase self-confidence was evident across multiple*

data sources. The “fear of failure” and the unknowns of the job site were also barriers for individuals with disabilities.

- *The enhanced visibility of the OVR Pre-ETS outreach and services has helped bridge the gap transitioning students' post-graduation.*
- *Excessive procurement processes are delaying opportunities for youth to participate in Pre-ETS on-the-job training programs.*
- *Individuals with disabilities ask for more varied job training opportunities that align with their potential career interests.*
- *IPE developed for this demographic does not adhere to federal mandates.*

Part D: Individuals with Disabilities Served Through Other Components of The Statewide Workforce Development System (WIOA)

- *The majority of individuals with disabilities have not availed of WIOA programming, do not clearly understand the WIOA programming, are unaware of eligibility requirements, and cannot distinguish what constitutes as WIOA-funded programming in the CNMI.*
- *Utilizing one unified software system is a challenge to a fully integrated partnership between OVR, WIA, and ABE.*
- *Businesses who participate in the WIA Program are sometimes thought to be taking advantage of participants and do not extend employment opportunities post-program.*
- *OVR needs to show a greater presence on the State Workforce Development Board.*
- *OVR, WIA, and ABE could leverage their strengths agencies through integrated partnerships to best serve individuals with disabilities.*

Section Three: Community Rehabilitation Programs Within the CNMI

Recurring themes in section three include:

- The timeliness and availability of assistive technology through vendors and procurement were barriers to receiving vocational services.
- Low-to-no service providers in some specialized fields are a barrier to services.

Section Four: Needs of Employers and Businesses

Recurring themes in section four include:

- Outreach to employers has been a concentrated effort of OVR in the last few years. There is an increase in employers' awareness of OVR; however, most business managers are still unaware of OVR services.
- Most employers were favorable regarding hiring individuals with disabilities, noting they were often more reliable and dedicated to work when provided with a supportive environment and the right opportunities.
- The highest reported fears by employers were how to ask a client about their reasonable accommodations and the fear of legal ramifications.
- Businesses associated with OVR stated that long procurement processes are barriers to partnership for OJT and WET programs.

INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is responsible for administering the CNMI's public vocational rehabilitation program. While OVR continuously assesses its performance based on the needs of those living in the CNMI with disabilities, the Rehabilitation Act, as amended, Public Law 99-506 Section 101(a), requires each state vocational rehabilitation agency to conduct a comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) jointly with the State Rehabilitation Committee (SRC) triennially. The results of the CSNA are used to develop goals, priorities, strategies, and actions for OVR's State Plan.

To meet the requirements of 34 CFR §361.29, the CSNA must address the following:

- What are the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing in CNMI, particularly the vocational rehabilitation services needs of the following:
 - Individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;
 - Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program; •
 - Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce development system as identified by those individuals and personnel assisting those individuals through the components of the system and;

- Youth with disabilities, and students with disabilities, including;
 - Their needs for pre-employment transition services or other transition services; and
 - An assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services provided are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities.
- An assessment of the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) within the state.

The project team utilized multiple data sources to inform the 2020 CSNA, including OVR-generated data reports, paper and online surveys, focus groups, local and statewide studies, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports, and data reported to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

The administrative staff of the OVR first reviewed the draft findings of the 2020 CSNA for comments. The SRC then reviewed their revisions for further recommendations and approval. This collaborative effort by OVR and the SRC will inform future steps towards addressing the unmet needs of employment for people with disabilities in the CNMI.

METHODOLOGY

Summary of Methodology

The 2020 CSNA utilized qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, including paper surveys, online surveys, in-person focus groups, and online focus groups. Due to limitations in travel due to COVID-19, paper and online surveys were the preferred data collection methods. A summary of the number of participants is below.

TABLE 1: TOTAL FOCUS GROUP OR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS IN 2020 CSNA

Total Participation	Location or Location Serviced by Respondents						
	Saipan		Tinian		Rota		Total
	Focus Group	Survey	Focus Group	Survey	Focus Group	Survey	
Individuals with Disabilities	8	68	0	7	1	13	97
Disability Network Partners*	4	10	1	4	0	3	15*
Employers/Businesses**	3	49	0	17	0	13	53**
OVR Staff	12	2	0		0		14
Total							179

* Disability Network Service providers were asked to indicate all islands in which they serviced. This led to one responder potentially representing multiple islands. In total, 10 DSPs participated in the partner survey.
 ** Employers/Businesses were asked to indicate all islands in which they operated. This led to one responder potentially representing multiple islands. In total, 50 DSPs participated in the employer/business survey.

As survey respondents are confidential, there is the possibility of overlap between individual survey respondents and individual focus group participants. Noting this limitation, a total of 179 respondents contributed input to the 2020 CSNA. The number of respondents in the 2017/2018 OVR CNSA was 176, meaning the number of participants in the 2020 CSNA is comparable to former research results. The following sections outline survey, focus group, and data analysis methodology.

[Survey Methodology for Individuals with Disabilities \(Paper & Online\)](#)

Instrument. The instrument used for the online survey of individuals with disabilities (Appendix A) was developed by the former project team who produced the 2017/2018 CSNA (San Diego University). The same survey questions were used to compare trends in respondents from 2018 to 2021. Google Forms was used for the online survey platform, and the survey was sent to current OVR clients and posted on OVR social media outlets. The same questions were reformatted, printed, and sent to a random sample of 100 consumers in Saipan, Tinian, and Rota who were OVR clients in 2019.

Survey population. The target respondents for the paper surveys were individuals with disabilities who were clients of OVR in 2019. The online surveys' target population was individuals with disabilities who were potential, past, or current clients of OVR.

Data collection. To select respondents for the paper survey, OVR shared an unidentifiable spreadsheet of 2019 active clients with the project team; from this spreadsheet, one-hundred (100) client case numbers were selected at

random. These clients were sent paper copies of the survey along with a stamped return envelope addressed to OVR. Copies of the surveys were sealed and handed over to the project team. Additionally, all clients within the OVR database were sent electronic copies of the survey through email. Finally, the electronic survey was disseminated on social media platforms for the general disability population. Responses to the online surveys were sent directly to the project team.

Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality. The project team did not have access to the names of the individuals who were sent the link to the online survey, and nowhere in the paper or the online survey was the respondent asked to enter their name. While paper survey envelopes may have included the respondent's name, the responses were separated from the envelope, discarded, and then aggregated by the project team. Answers to questions are only presented in the aggregate and with unidentifiable information.

Accessibility. Utilizing both the paper and online survey were strategies to outreach to respondents with different accessibility needs. In both the paper and online survey, respondents were asked to reach out to the project team via email or phone if they needed to participate in an alternative format.

Data analysis. For questions with set options for response, computing frequencies and descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. For open-ended questions and answers indicated as "other," responses were

tagged for themes or trends and aggregated into the data set.

Number of completed surveys. Individuals with disabilities completed a total of 42 online surveys and 46 hard copy surveys. The response rate for online surveys is ambiguous, as social media outlets were a means of outreach. The estimated response rate for the random sample of paper surveys is 46%.

Survey of Disability Network Partners

Instrument. The instrument used for the electronic survey of disability network partners was developed by the project team based on other State CSNAs and the critical questions to inform the CSNA. The online survey platform was Google Forms.

Survey population. The target respondents for the disability network partners were individuals employed by disability network partners, individuals who volunteer in leadership roles with Disability Network Partners, members of the CNMI State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), and members of the CNMI State Independent Living Council

Data collection. OVR staff identified 34 disability network partners. The survey team sent emails to these 34 individuals asking them to participate in the CSNA by completing the online survey, participating in the online focus group, or participating in both the survey and the focus groups.

Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality. Nowhere in the online survey was the respondent asked to enter their name. Responses to questions are

only presented in the aggregate and with unidentifiable information.

Accessibility. In the online survey, respondents were presented the option to participate in an alternative format upon contacting the project team. Participants could also participate in the focus group if they preferred to provide feedback in this alternative medium.

Data analysis. For questions with set options for response, frequency in descriptive statistics was used for data analysis. For open-ended questions and set options where respondents chose "other," responses were tagged for themes or trends and aggregated into the data set.

Number of completed surveys. A total of 10 online surveys were completed by the target population, making the estimated response rate is 29%.

Survey of OVR Staff

Instrument. The instrument used for the electronic survey for OVR staff was developed by the project team based on other State CSNAs and the computing frequencies descriptive statistics questions needed to inform the CSNA. The online survey platform was Google Forms.

Survey population. The target respondents for the survey were staff employed at OVR who focused on counseling services.

Data collection. The survey team sent an email to the OVR counseling staff asking them to complete the online survey, participate in the in-person focus group, or both complete the survey and participate in the in-person

focus group.

Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality. Nowhere in the online survey was the respondent asked to enter their names. Responses to questions are only presented in the aggregate and with unidentifiable information.

Accessibility. In the online survey, respondents were presented the option to participate in an alternative format upon contacting the project team. Participants could also participate in the focus group if they preferred to provide feedback in this alternative medium.

Data analysis. For questions with set options for response, frequency in descriptive statistics was used for data analysis. For open-ended questions and set options where respondents chose "other," responses were tagged for themes or trends and aggregated into the data set.

Number of completed surveys. A total of 2 online surveys were completed by the target population, making the estimated response rate was 20%.

Survey of Employers and CNMI Businesses

Instrument. The instrument used for the electronic survey for OVR staff was developed by the project team based on other research published in the Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation,¹ other states' CSNAs, and the critical questions needed to inform the CSNA. The online survey platform was Google Forms.

Survey population. The target respondents were the following: 1) businesses

and employers currently associated with OVR; 2) businesses who are not presently associated with OVR; 3) human resource professionals associated with the Society of Human Management (SHRM) – Northern Mariana Islands (NMI) Chapter; and 4) select members of the Saipan Chamber of Commerce (SCC). The survey was sent to one hundred and five (105) employers and businesses.

Data collection. The survey team received a listing of current businesses and employers associated with OVR. These individuals received emails with the option to complete the survey, participate in a focus group, or complete the survey and participate in a focus group. Additionally, the project team reached out to the SHRM – NMI Chapter, who distributed the survey link to its membership. Several Saipan Chamber of Commerce business partners were also invited to participate.

Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality. Nowhere in the online survey was the respondent asked to enter their names. Responses to questions are only presented in the aggregate and with unidentifiable information.

Accessibility. In the online survey, respondents were presented the option to participate in an alternative format upon contacting the project team. Participants could also participate in the focus group if they preferred to provide feedback in this alternative medium.

Data analysis. For questions with set options for response, frequency in descriptive statistics was used for data analysis. For open-ended questions

and set options where respondents chose "other," responses were tagged for themes or trends and aggregated into the data set.

Number of completed surveys. The target population completed a total of 50 online surveys. The number of respondents who may have received the online survey through social media is unknown, so the project team cannot estimate the inclusive individual survey response rate. The paper survey response rate is 46%.

Focus Groups:

Eight (8) focus groups were conducted during the needs assessment, which included representatives from four stakeholder groups: Individuals with disabilities, representatives of organizations within the disability network partners, businesses/employers, and OVR Staff. Due to COVID-19, focus groups took place primarily online via Zoom. A total of twenty-nine (29) participants participated in focus groups. Compared to previous years, this is a lower number; however, there were expanded opportunities for disability network partners and businesses/employers to give feedback via an online survey compared to previous years.

Focus group participants included individuals with disabilities recruited by OVR staff, disability partners identified by OVR staff, employers and businesses identified by OVR staff, and the OVR staff themselves. The focus group format included a few minutes to introduce the purpose of the CSNA, review the consent forms, agree to the terms, and reinforce that the information shared during the focus group remains confidential.

The focus groups' protocols were developed by San Diego University for OVR in the 2017/2018 CSNA and maintained for consistency. An additional question was added to account for current landscapes due to COVID-19. Participants were allowed to respond to each question, revisit past questions, or deviate from the conversation as needed

Focus groups were recorded and transcribed through an online audio transcribing service to ensure accuracy. The project team served as the focus group moderator. Transcriptions were then reviewed and tagged for themes and trends related to the survey data.

Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality. The moderator did not record names and other identifying characteristics. If a person referred to another participant by name during the session, the project team removed their name from the written transcription. The moderator asked participants to accept or deny permission to be quoted anonymously in the CSNA by indicating their consent forms. Answers to questions were only relayed to the OVR team in aggregate through the CSNA. Additionally, the OVR team only attended the focus group explicitly organized for OVR staff.

Accessibility. Due to COVID-19 and limitations in travel, focus groups for individuals with disabilities took place in person for those located in Saipan and over Zoom for those located in Saipan, Tinian, and Rota. If OVR received requests for special accommodations for individuals with disabilities participating in focus groups before the meeting(s), the project team made accommodations for requests.

Analysis of OVR Data

The project team at Max Impacts compared OVR's performance data from 2017-2019 to 2014 - 2016, noting limitations in community factors that may have influenced changes in data. Data provided was in aggregate was unidentifiable.

The data from OVR was compared to the estimated populations in the 2016 CNMI Department of Commerce HIES. As the CNMI does not participate in the CPS or ACS, this data was the most reliable source of estimating the disability population in the Northern Mariana Islands.

Analysis and Triangulation of Data

The data gathered from the national and agency-specific data sets, data produced through CSNA-related surveys, and themes in focus groups were analyzed by the project team of Max Impacts. Agency-specific datasets are heavily utilized in this report and provided by OVR staff.

Themes that intersected results of surveys and focus groups compared to the national and agency-specific data were recorded and indicated as findings, which ultimately inform the recommendations sections.

Dissemination Plans

The CSNA report is delivered to OVR and the SRC. The project team recommends sharing the report with contacted participants for the survey and focus groups, disability network partners, and publicly displaying the 2020 CSNA on OVR's website.

Study Limitations

As with all comprehensive analyses, there are study limitations that may impact the results generated. Some potential study limitations that may affect this CSNA include participant bias, noting that participation is voluntary. Those who choose to volunteer their time may be more positively associated with OVR or more negatively associated with OVR. Additionally, responses were recorded for individuals with disabilities who could be reached and had the resources of time and access to participate. While steps were taken to address accessibility, some implicit bias is that individuals who are less associated with OVR may not have their opinions fully reflected in the outcomes. This limits the study's ability to generalize for the entire disability population in the CNMI. Additionally, data provided by OVR is reflective of current clients, past clients, and potential clients who attempted to apply for OVR services. The data inheritably leaves out the trends of those unserved by OVR resources.

As the 2020 CSNA allowed for participation from disability network partners and employers/businesses via online surveys and/or focus groups, input was split between these two mediums and resulted in smaller focus group numbers. Information from focus groups was still recorded and reported in the 2020 CSNA, so long as it aligned with other trends seen in survey responses and within different focus groups. However, this means that a small number of people represent these participant groups and may not reflect their entire community.

Additionally, there were limited opportunities to compare state-specific data standardly used for disability communities. The American Community Survey (ACS) nor the Current Population Survey (CPS), standard datasets depicting characteristics of individuals with disabilities, are not conducted in the CNMI. The 2016 CNMI Department of Commerce Household Income and Expenditures Survey (HIES) to supplement data gaps. Lastly, while analyzed data in this report reflect trends in 2017 – 2019, answers within individual surveys and focus groups reflect trends in 2021. As the CNMI has experienced major shocks to its economy from 2019 to 2021, current trends in employment may be better reflected through focus group data than past agency-specific data.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND EXTERNAL IMPACTS

Over the last decade, there have been four (4) significant shocks to the CNMI economy that have impacted the gross domestic product, the stability of the economy, and ultimately the availability of jobs:

- **2015 – Super Typhoon Soudelor** landed in August 2015, which resulted in the devastation of homes damage to establishments. While there was no drop in the number of employed workers (Figure 1), 808 families faced damages to their homes,ⁱⁱ creating instability in households.
- **2016 - 2017– The rise in Gaming Industry** resulted in a 28.4% and 25.5% growth in GDP in 2016 and 2017, respectively. (Figure 2). This rise in GDP assumes an increase in the availability of jobs in an expanding economy.
- **2018 – Super Typhoon Yutu**, a Category-5 storm that created massive destruction, led to a -19.6% drop in GDP for 2018. Due to damaged infrastructure at the Saipan International Airport and international press questioning the safety of the Marianas, a significant reduction in visitor arrivals occurred in both 2018 and 2019. Tourist arrival numbers decreased to levels last seen in the previous 2011 recession (Figure 3).
- **2020 – Coronavirus Pandemic**, which created worldwide chaos, resulted in the absolute halt of the CNMI's only industry – tourism. While limited data exists to show current impacts, as of March 2021, the CNMI is still closed to tourists with no anticipated reopening date for travel.ⁱⁱⁱ

The significant shocks have multi-year effects and with varying and compounding impacts on the labor market. The most recent comprehensive report on the economic viability of the Marianas was in February 2020, where the US GAO noted that while the size of the CNMI workforce grew from 2014

to 2017, contraction of the workforce started in 2018 by 5.6 percent,^{iv} with assumptions of further contraction due to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

FIGURE 1: GAO-20-305 ANALYSIS OF THE NUMBER OF EMPLOYED WORKERS IN THE CNMI CALENDAR YEARS 2001 - 2018

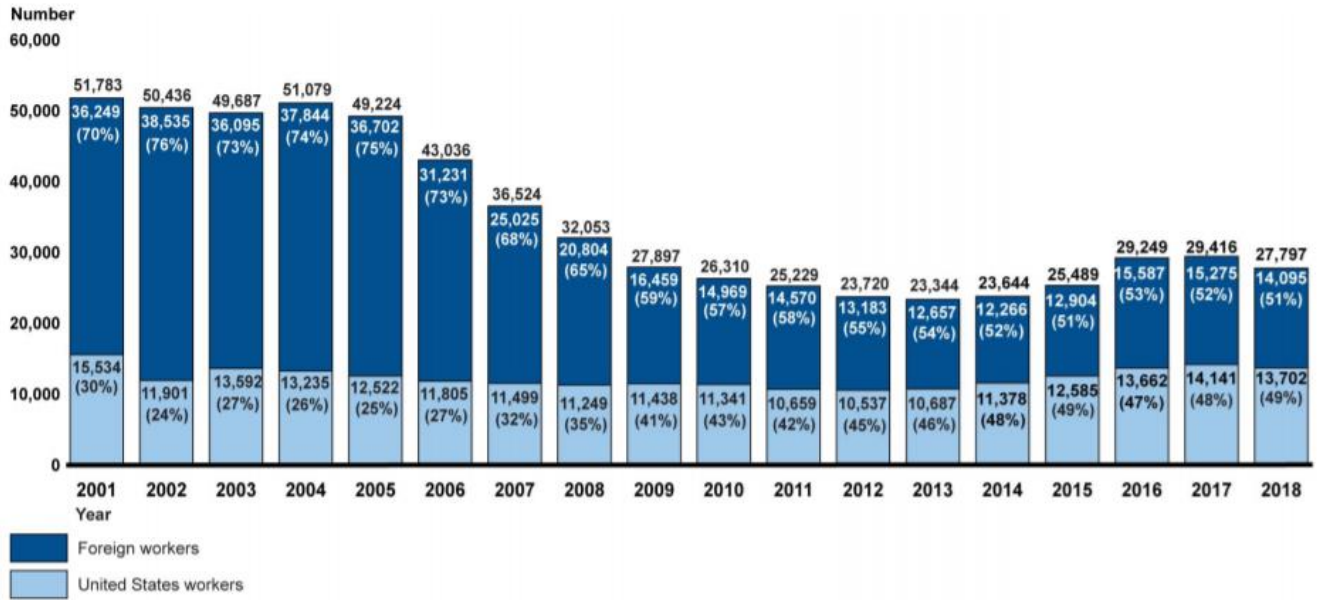


FIGURE 2: GAO 20-305 ANALYSIS OF PERCENT CHANGE FROM PROCEEDING YEAR IN THE CNMI REAL GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP), 2008-2018

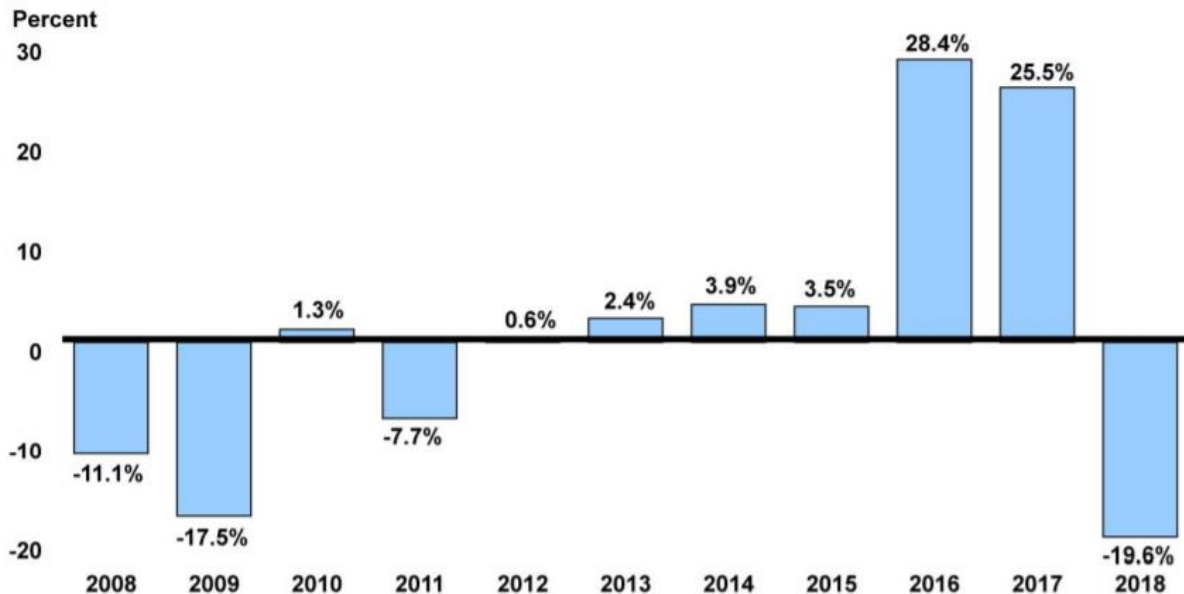
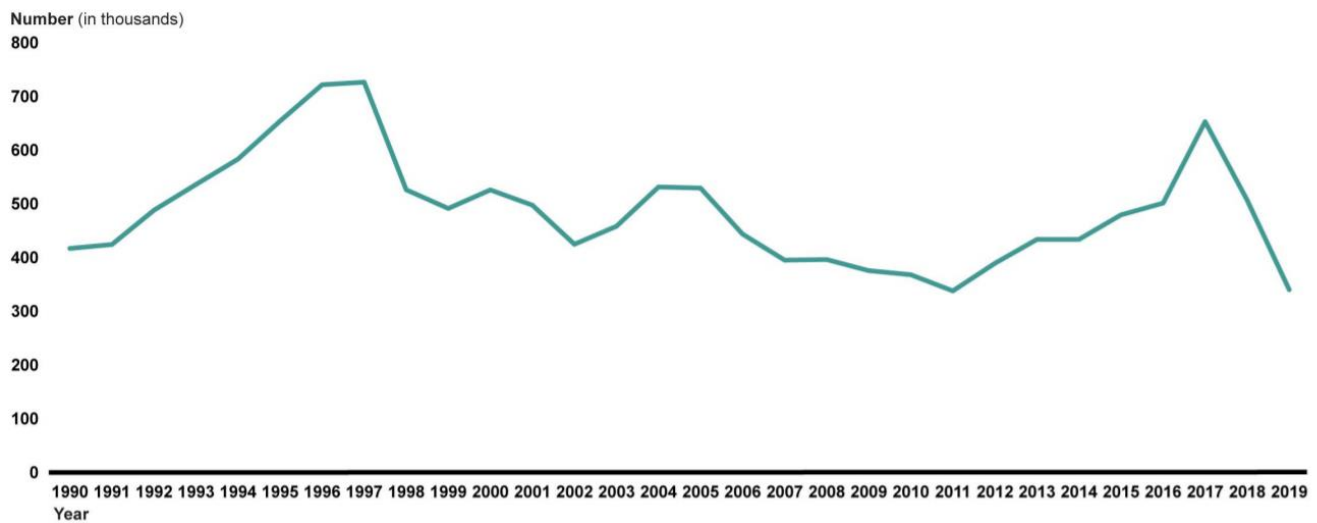


FIGURE 3: GAO-20-305 ANALYSIS OF CNMI ANNUAL VISITOR ARRIVALS, FISCAL YEARS 1990-2019



Study Limitations Based on External Impacts

The CNMI is unique in many ways, being a U.S. territory in Micronesia with a sole industry of tourism. Even American Samoa, a U.S. territory in the Pacific of similar populations, has a primary industry unrelated to tourism (i.e., tuna exports) and faced an economic shock from Tropical Storm Gita in 2018, impacting economic indicators.^v Therefore, there is no similar-enough community to serve as a baseline for statistical analysis, limiting the project teams' ability to conduct regression analysis to determine cause-and-effect relationships between the variables introduced by shocks and the trends in the CNMI workforce. Additionally, it is impossible to determine cause-and-effect relationships between these shocks and data presented by OVR related to servicing people with disabilities. This limits the project team's ability to determine if fluctuations in data are entirely reflective of changes to OVR's policies and procedures or if the fluctuations are more reflective of the economic landscape of the CNMI.

SECTION ONE: OVR GENERAL PERFORMANCE.

The CSNA will first assess the overall general performance of OVR and how it is fulfilling its mission to increase employment and promote independence among eligible individuals with disabilities throughout the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The general performance also includes assessments of internal operations and adherence to federal mandates for the length of time to provide services as indicated in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as amended by WIOA). Lastly, OVR is assessed against its effectiveness in connecting individuals with disabilities to job placements through rehabilitation.

The structure of this section, as well as the proceeding sections, will address the following:

1. Data that pertains to the section in question, including observations based on the data;
2. Electronic and hard copy survey results of the section;
3. Recurring/consensual themes that emerged during focus groups; and survey narratives
4. Recommendations to address the findings in each area of the assessment.

The time period covered by this comprehensive statewide needs assessment is the three-year period from October 1, 2016, to September 30, 2019. Federal RSA data and OVR data are based on the Federal Fiscal Year. The data on agency performance included in this section comes from the case management system used by OVR and available RSA data.

Recurring Themes Across all Data Collection Methods

The following recurring themes emerged in the area of Overall Agency Performance:

- *OVR has improved services for current and past clients, with clients noting very few barriers to accessing OVR resources and satisfaction with overall services provided.*
- *OVR is processing casework and moving consumers through the V.R. process well within the established time frames.*
- *There is still community confusion amongst potential clients, current clients, community partners, and businesses/employers on the array of OVR services provided and eligibility for services, which was also present in the 2017/2018 CSNA.*
- *As numbers of clients increase due to COVID-19 and community impacts, hiring more OVR counselors would ease caseloads and best serve clients.*
- *Rehabilitation rates remain lower than the national average, and several factors may be contributing to low rehabilitation rates.*
- *Community external economic and disaster-related factors may play a prominent role in varying data reports, availability of services, and speed of procurement processing. However, increased communication between OVR staff and clients has minimized frustrations experienced due to external factors.*

Agency Specific Data Related to Overall Agency Performance

Tables 2, 3, and 4 identify various data elements that illustrate OVR's overall program performance for the current three-year period (2017-2019). This data is compared to the previous three-year period (2014-2016) from the 2017/2018 CSNA to show trends over time.

TABLE 2: GENERAL PERFORMANCE DATA FOR OVR 2014—2019, APPLICATIONS, ELIGIBILITY, AND SIGNIFICANCE OF DISABILITY

ITEM	ALL CONSUMERS			ALL CONSUMERS		
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Applications	137	144	133	84	100	99
% of apps found eligible	53.28%	66.67%	56.39%	72.62%	63.00%	55.56%
# of apps found eligible	73	96	75	61	63	55
Ave. time for elig. determination (days)	58	44	47	54	41	44
Significance of Disability						
Disabled	14	13	2	4	3	8
% of total	19.18%	13.54%	2.67%	6.56%	4.76%	14.55%
Significant	42	58	47	35	37	23
% of total	57.53%	60.42%	62.67%	57.38%	58.73%	41.82%
Most significant	17	25	26	22	23	24
% of total	23.29%	26.04%	34.67%	36.07%	36.51%	43.64%

General Data for OVR: Percent Changes in 2017 - 2019 as Compared to 2014 – 2016

Table 2 shows that there were both rises and declines in the number of applicants for services between 2014 to 2019. When comparing the 3-year averages, there was a -31.67% decrease in 2017 – 2019 compared to the earlier 2014 – 2016 average. The decline may be due to external changes in community factors; however, there are a few observations to note:

- The average time for eligibility determination has decreased between 2017 – 2019 (~46.3 days) compared to 2014 – 2016 (~49.7 days) and is still well below the 60 days required by law.
- There is a varying percent of eligible applications, ranging from 72.62% in 2017 to 55.56% in 2019.
- There are consistently lower numbers of those who are disabled found eligible as compared to higher rates of those with significant or most significant disabilities. Those with the most significant disabilities as a percent of the eligible population have continued to rise from 2015 – 2019.

Table 3 also shows varying rises and declines over the 6-year period for Individual Plans for Employment (IPEs) and consumers by training type.

- There were consistently fewer Individual Plans for Employment (IPEs) written from 2017 to 2019 (52.3) as compared to 2014 – 2016 (77.3), which is also consistent with the fewer number of overall applicants from 2017 -2019. The average time frame from 2017 – 2019 (40 days) is less than half of the maximum time frame of 90 days permitted as determined by the Rehabilitation Act as amended.
- Training for undergraduates consistently appears to be the most successful consumer training type over the 6-year period. There was a high jump of 86.7% from 2018 to 2019, which may indicate stronger partnerships with secondary institutions.

TABLE 3: GENERAL PERFORMANCE DATA FOR OVR 2014—2019, IPEs AND CONSUMER TRAINING BY TYPE

ITEM	ALL CONSUMERS			ALL CONSUMERS		
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
% closed prior to IPE development	6.90%	9.09%	19.15%	8.20%	17.46%	29.09%
# closed prior to IPE development	4	4	9	5	11	16
Plans developed	68	83	81	53	45	59
# Days from eligibility to plan	36	30	46	37	33	50
Number of consumers in training by type						
Vocational	1	4	4	6	4	0
Undergraduate	16	21	21	18	15	28
Graduate	0	0	0	0	0	0

TABLE 4: GENERAL PERFORMANCE DATA FOR OVR 2014—2019, CASES CLOSED, REHABILITATION, EARNINGS, AND COSTS

ITEM	ALL CONSUMERS			ALL CONSUMERS		
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Ave. # days of open case for cases closed other than rehabilitated	814	911	1100	1023	1298	1247
Cases closed other than rehabilitated	26	17	28	35	23	50
Ave. # days of open cases closed rehabilitated	669	517	681	714	851	796
# of cases closed rehabilitated	37	22	48	31	25	24
Rehabilitation rate	58.73%	56.41%	63.16%	46.97%	52.08%	32.43%
Median earnings of those closed as successfully rehabilitated	\$17,992	\$17,628	\$19,396	\$14,976	\$15,100	\$21,268
Total # cases served	310	309	341	267	262	264
Ave. cost of all cases	\$715.86	\$852.98	\$784.19	\$714.24	\$508.31	\$540.46
Ave. cost of cases closed rehabilitated	\$1,098.08	\$1,663.11	\$1,872.70	\$1,421.97	\$1,129.89	\$2,049.21
Ave. cost per case closed unsuccessful	\$256.36	\$3.53	\$23.21	\$405.69	\$428.07	\$20.51
Ave. cost per case prior to plan	\$76.56	\$69.56	\$46.01	\$21.13	\$0	\$0

As consistent with other trends, there were both rises and falls within the 6-year period in Table 4.

- Average lengths of open cases closed other than rehabilitation mostly trended upward from 2014 – 2019. This upward trend may be due to vendor availability and difficulty procuring items in years post major disasters (Typhoon Soudelor & Typhoon Yutu).
- The average rehabilitation rate dropped from 2017 -2019 (43.83%) compared to 2014 – 2016 (59.43%).
- Median earnings of those successfully rehabilitation reached an all-period high in 2019 at \$21,268.
- The average total number of cases served was consistently lower in 2017-2019 (~264) than in 2014-2016 (~320).
- The average cost of all cases closed was lowest in 2018 and 2019, with a consistently low average cost of those successfully rehabilitated from 2017 – 2019 (\$1,530.36).

Observations from General Data:

- Many of the indicators saw peaks and valleys in the years 2016 and 2019. This fluctuation may be due to similar trends in years following natural disasters (Typhoons Soudelor and Yutu, respectively).
- The average time to determine eligibility has decreased from an average of 49.7 days in 2014 -2016 to 46.3 days in 2017 – 2019 and is still consistently below the mandated 60-day threshold.
- The average time to develop IPEs was 40 days from 2017 – 2019, less than half of the mandated 90-day threshold.
- The average cost of cases closed and rehabilitated was nearly \$1,500, which is well below the national average for VR programs.

- The percent of applications found eligible faced consistently downward trends from 2017 to 2019. This downward trend may be due to increased outreach efforts to reach new clients; however, the data shows more clarity around programming and eligibility requirements may be necessary during outreach events.
- The rehabilitation rate dropped from a high in 2016 (64.16%) to a period low in 2019 (32.43%). OVR should continue to monitor the rehabilitation rate and focus on increasing this indicator over time.

General Data for OVR: Trends by Gender

Table 5 shows the general performance of OVR as distinguished by male and female. General Observations include the following:

- Males received consistently more applications. Percent of apps found eligible were trending downward for both genders from 2017 – 2019, with men experiencing higher percentages found eligible for services.
- There was a spike in the number of disabled females served between 2018 and 2019,
- For the average length of the open case (days) for cases closed rehabilitated, males experienced a 39.7% increase in the length of open days from 2018 to 2019 (734 days, 1026 days, respectively) while females experienced a 51.5% decrease in length of days for the same time period (977 to 474).
- Equal numbers of males and females participated in Undergraduate training in 2019.
- Overall, there appear to be no clear trends that would indicate that either females or males consistently receive better services from OVR.

TABLE 5: GENERAL PERFORMANCE DATA FOR OVR 2017 – 2019 BY GENDER

ITEM	GENDER					
	MALE			FEMALE		
	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019
Applications	52	52	58	32	48	41
% of apps found elig.	76.92%	65.38%	58.62%	65.63%	60.42%	51.22%
# of apps found elig.	40	34	34	21	29	21
Ave. time for elig. determination	55	43	47	53	39	39
Significance of Disability						
Disabled	2	2	2	2	1	6
% of total	5.00%	5.88%	5.88%	9.52%	3.45%	28.57%
Significant	22	19	15	13	18	8
% of total	55.00%	55.88%	44.12%	61.90%	62.07%	38.10%
Most Significant	16	13	17	6	10	7
% of total	40.00%	38.24%	50.00%	28.57%	34.48%	33.33%
% closed prior to IPE development	2.50%	23.53%	35.29%	19.05%	10.34%	19.05%
# closed prior to IPE development	1	8	12	4	3	4
Plans developed	34	23	35	19	22	24
Ave. time from eligibility to plan (days)	42	30	54	29	37	42
# of consumers in training by type						
Vocational	2	3	0	4	1	0
Undergraduate	7	5	14	11	10	14
Graduate	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ave. # days case open for cases closed other than rehabilitated	1028	1335	1281	1014	1211	1192

Cases close other than rehabilitated	23	16	31	12	7	19
Ave # days cases open for cases closed rehabilitated	748	734	1026	652	977	474
Number of cases closed rehabilitated	20	13	14	11	12	10
Rehabilitation rate	46.51%	44.83%	31.11%	47.83%	63.16%	34.48%
Median earnings of those closed as successfully rehabilitated	\$13,863	\$18,595	\$21,216	\$15,080	\$14,664	\$22,100
Total number of cases served	162	149	150	105	113	114
Ave. cost of all cases	\$675.15	\$356.19	\$407.99	\$774.55	\$708.90	\$714.77
Ave. cost of cases closed rehabilitated	\$1,724.57	\$1,058.85	\$741.25	\$942.85	\$1,227.10	\$3,856.36
Ave. cost per case closed unsuccessful	\$265.36	\$244.12	\$2.09	\$673.60	\$807.14	\$54.94
Ave. cost per case closed prior to plan	\$29.59	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

General Performance Data for OVR 2017 – 2019 by Age

Table 6 below identifies the available data elements by age group served by OVR from 2017 – 2019.

- Trends in the number of applications are primarily consistent per age group over the three-year period.
- In 2019, individuals aged 14 – 25 experienced a significant increase of 140% in the average time from eligibility to plan days (33 days to 79 days). This number is still under the mandated average of 90 days, but OVR should continue to monitor the upward trend.
- Ages 14 – 24 experienced the highest rates of those with the most significant disabilities from 2017 – 2019 (average 67.85).
- Ages 65+ indicated some of the highest rehabilitation rates in 2017 and 2018 (62.5% and 60%, respectively). However, due to the small sample size (N = 5,3), this may not indicate a significant finding.

TABLE 6: GENERAL PERFORMANCE DATA FOR OVR 2017 – 2019 BY AGE

ITEM	AGE								
	14-24			25-64			65+		
	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019
Applications	28	32	30	51	61	64	5	7	5
% of apps eligible	78.57%	81.25%	60.00%	70.59%	54.10%	53.13%	60.00%	57.14%	60.00%
# of apps eligible	22	26	18	36	33	34	3	4	3
Ave. time for eligibility determination	44	42	38	62	42	46	44	40	54
Significance of Disability									
Disabled	0	1	0	4	2	7	0	0	1
% of total	0.00%	3.85%	0.00%	11.11%	6.06%	20.59%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%

Significant	7	10	4	25	23	17	3	4	2
% of total	31.82%	38.46%	22.22%	69.44%	69.70%	50.00%	100.00%	100.00%	66.67%
Most Significant	15	15	14	7	8	10	0	0	0
% of total	68.18%	57.69%	77.78%	19.44%	24.24%	29.41%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
% closed prior to IPE development	4.55%	23.08%	22.22%	11.11%	15.15%	32.35%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%
# closed prior to IPE development	1	6	4	4	5	11	0	0	1
Plans developed	20	16	22	30	26	34	3	3	3
Ave. time from elig. to plan (days)	49	33	79	31	36	33	16	12	17
Number of consumers in training by type									
Vocational	3	2	0	3	2	0	0	0	0
Undergraduate	13	11	21	5	4	7	0	0	0
Graduate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ave. # days case open for cases closed other than rehabilitated	1301	1188	1154	937	1481	1315	612	544	819
Cases close other than rehabilitated	11	8	15	21	13	33	3	2	2
Ave. # days case open for cases closed rehabilitated	1152	1503	1212	656	609	680	418	239	269
# of cases closed	6	8	6	20	14	17	5	3	1

rehab- ilitated									
Rehab- ilitation rate	35.29%	50.00%	28.57%	48.78%	51.85%	34.00%	62.50%	60.00%	33.33%
Median earnings of closed and success- fully rehab- ilitated	\$13,624	\$14,664	\$15,080	\$15,860	\$17,357	\$22,984	\$20,800	\$17,139	\$22,100
Total # of cases served	98	100	89	155	151	164	14	11	11
Ave. cost of all cases	\$410.40	\$387.40	\$275.68	\$927.16	\$560.99	\$678.73	\$483.79	\$879.56	\$621.28
Ave. cost of cases closed rehab- ilitated	\$246.10	\$770.26	\$0.00	\$2,202.82	\$1,139.07	\$2,878.89	\$4.17	\$2,418.79	\$0.00
Ave. cost per case closed unsucces- ful	\$308.60	\$159.20	\$52.20	\$406.41	\$630.27	\$8.23	\$1,124.67	\$0.00	\$0.00
Ave. cost per case closed prior to plan	\$18.46	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$22.20	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

Common Performance Accountability Measures for the VR Program

Amendments to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) included a phased-in approach for expanding standard performance accountability measures for State V.R. Programs. In Program Year 2017, states started to report primary indicators of performance outlined in section 116.^{vi} The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) collects all reporting for states and territories now on an annual basis.

For P.Y. 2019, State V.R. programs reported performance across five indicators:

1. *Measurable Skill Gain (MSG) Rate* (participants during P.Y. 2019);
2. *Employment Rate in the Second Quarter after Exit* (participants who exited during P.Y. 2018);
3. *Median Earnings in the Second Quarter after Exit* (participants who exited during P.Y. 2018);
4. *Employment Rate in the Fourth Quarter after Exit* (participants who exited during C.Y. 2018); and
5. *Credential Attainment Rate* (participants who exited during C.Y. 2018)

The following tables from RSA data show the National Summaries and Statewide V.R. Program Reports in ETA-9169 (OMB Control No: 1205-0526). Table 7 summarizes information regarding individuals with disabilities with closed cases in the Northern Mariana Islands. Table 8 shows the five performance indicators by participant characteristics. Table 9 shows the five performance indicators by employment barriers. Table 10 shows a comparison of the aggregate of these five indicators to other U.S. Territories against the national average.

TABLE 7: NORTHERN MARIANAS WIOA STATEWIDE AND LOCAL PERFORMANCE REPORT
SUMMARY, JUNE 2020

SUMMARY INFORMATION				
Service	Participants Served (Cohort Period: 07/01/2019 - 06/30/2020)	Participants Exited (Cohort Period: 07/01/2019 - 06/30/2020)	Funds Expended (Cohort Period: 07/01/2019 - 06/30/2020)	Cost Per Participant Served (Cohort Period: 07/01/2019 - 06/30/2020)
Career Services	128	42	\$8,825	\$551
Training Services	61	17	\$57,737	\$1,924
Percent training-related employment¹:		Percent enrolled in more than one core program:		Percent Admin Expended:
N/A		0.0%		N/A

TABLE 8: NORTHERN MARIANAS WIOA STATEWIDE AND LOCAL PERFORMANCE REPORT
BY PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS, JUNE 2020

BY PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS													
		Total Participants Served	Total Participants Exited		Employment Rate (Q2) ² (Cohort Period: 07/01/2018 - 06/30/2019)		Employment Rate (Q4) ² (Cohort Period: 01/01/2018 - 12/31/2018)		Median Earnings (Cohort Period: 07/01/2018 - 06/30/2019)	Credential Rate ³ (Cohort Period: 01/01/2018 - 12/31/2018)		Measurable Skill Gains ³ (Cohort Period: 07/01/2019 - 06/30/2020)	
					Num	Rate	Num	Rate	Earnings	Num	Rate	Num	Rate
					Negotiated Target		Baseline		Baseline		Baseline		Baseline
Total Statewide		145	49										
				Actual	23	33.8%	17	41.5%	5,496	0	0.0%	14	82.4%
Sex	Female	66	21		11	39.3%	8	53.3%	4,748	0	0.0%	6	75.0%
	Male	79	28		12	30.0%	9	34.6%	5,509	0	0.0%	8	88.9%
Age	< 16	-	-		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	16 - 18	31	8		-	-	-	-	3,770	0	0.0%	10	90.9%
	19 - 24	42	12		-	-	4	36.4%	3,900	0	0.0%	-	-
	25 - 44	25	8		-	27.3%	-	22.2%	5,496	0	0.0%	-	-
	45 - 54	22	9		6	33.3%	4	50.0%	8,279	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	55 - 59	5	-		5	50.0%	-	-	9,495	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	60+	19	8		-	-	-	-	4,748	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Ethnicity/Race	American Indian / Alaska Native	0	0		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Asian	34	14		-	-	4	57.1%	4,748	0	0.0%	-	-
	Black / African American	0	0		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Hispanic / Latino	0	0		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	107	32		18	32.7%	12	37.5%	5,400	0	0.0%	11	84.6%
	White	4	-		-	-	-	-	12,155	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	More Than One Race	0	0		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

TABLE 9: NORTHERN MARIANAS WIOA STATEWIDE AND LOCAL PERFORMANCE REPORT
BY EMPLOYMENT BARRIER, JUNE 2020

WIOA STATEWIDE AND LOCAL PERFORMANCE REPORT
June 2020

BY EMPLOYMENT BARRIER ⁴												
	Total Participants Served	Total Participants Exited		Employment Rate (Q2) ² (Cohort Period: 07/01/2018 - 06/30/2019)		Employment Rate (Q4) ² (Cohort Period: 01/01/2018 - 12/31/2018)		Median Earnings (Cohort Period: 07/01/2018 - 06/30/2019)	Credential Rate ³ (Cohort Period: 01/01/2018 - 12/31/2018)		Measurable Skill Gains ³ (Cohort Period: 07/01/2019 - 06/30/2020)	
				Num	Rate	Num	Rate	Earnings	Num	Rate	Num	Rate
				Negotiated Target		Baseline		Baseline		Baseline	Baseline	
Total Statewide	145	49										
			Actual	23	33.8%	17	41.5%	5,496	0	0.0%	14	82.4%
Displaced Homemakers	0	0		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
English Language Learners, Low Levels of Literacy, Cultural Barriers	62	18		5	23.8%	5	29.4%	3,900	0	0.0%	6	75.0%
Exhausting TANF within 2 years (Part A Title IV of the Social Security Act)	0	0		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Ex-offenders	0	0		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Homeless Individuals / runaway youth	0	0		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Long-term Unemployed (27 or more consecutive weeks)	46	12		-	-	-	-	3,770	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Low-income Individuals	88	23		5	17.2%	6	30.0%	4,363	0	0.0%	10	83.3%
Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers	0	0		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Individuals with Disabilities (incl. youth)	145	49		23	33.8%	17	41.5%	5,496	0	0.0%	14	82.4%
Single Parents (Incl. single pregnant women)	-	-		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Youth in foster care or aged out of system	0	0		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

¹Applies to Title I only.

²This indicator also includes those who entered into a training or education program for the Youth program.

³Credential Rate and Measurable Skill Gains do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser program.

⁴Barriers to Employment are determined at the point of entry into the program.

Observations on Common Performance Accountability Measures for OVR

The most significant barriers to entry for the population of individuals with disabilities served (other than their disability) was "low-income individuals" (60.1%), "English language learners, low levels of literacy, cultural barriers" (42.8%), and "long-term unemployed" (31.7%). While there were favorable employment rates in Q2 and Q4 for "low-income individuals" (23.8% and 29.4%, respectively) and "low-income individuals" (17.2% and 30%, respectively), there

was a 0% employment rate in Q2 and Q4 for the long-term unemployed. This percentage may indicate that the long-term unemployed are underserved. Additionally, long-term unemployment challenges may need disproportionate resources to move individuals into employment

TABLE 10: WIOA STATEWIDE AND LOCAL PERFORMANCE DATA FROM 2019, NATIONAL AVERAGES AS COMPARED TO NORTHERN MARIANAS, GUAM, AND THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATE NAME	NATIONAL	NORTHERN MARIANAS	GUAM	US VIRGIN ISLANDS
TOTAL STATEWIDE DATA	USA	MP	GU	VI
Total Participants Served	872,862	145	143	317
Total Participants Exited	280,593	49	17	91
Actual: Employment Q2 Number	144,938	23	18	-
Actual: Employment Q2 Rate	51.3	33.8	69.2	-
Actual: Employment Q4 Number	129,692	17	10	-
Actual: Employment Q4 Rate	43.6	41.5	52.6	-
Actual: Median Earnings	\$4,005.00	\$5,496.40	\$ 330.00	\$ 3,130.56
Actual: Credential Number	5,662	-	-	-
Actual: Credential Rate	11.2	-	-	-
Actual: Measurable Skills Number	80,988	14	0	0
Actual: Measurable Skills Rate	31.4	82.4	0	0

Overall, the Northern Marianas is comparable to other similar territories to its size (i.e., Guam and the Virgin Islands). Estimated populations by the World

Bank in 2019 include the following: Northern Marianas (57,216), Virgin Islands (106,631), Guam (167,294), and Puerto Rico (3,193,694).^{vii} As Puerto Rico has a significantly higher population, the territory was excluded from the analysis. As American Samoa did not submit data to RSA in 2019, they are also excluded from the analysis.

The CNMI, as compared to Guam, serviced more participants (145, 143, respectively), had more participants exit programming (49, 17, respectively), and had a higher employment number in Quarter 2 (23, 18) respectively. Unfortunately, the actual employment rate in Q2 for the CNMI (33.85%) was lower than the national average (51.3%) and Guam (69.2%). However, statewide employment in Q4 showed improvement in the Marianas (41.5%), which was comparable with the national average (43.6%) and Guam (52.6%). Statewide Median Earnings in the CNMI (\$5,496.40) were higher than the national average (\$4,005.00), the Virgin Islands (\$3,130.56). Additionally, the NMI experienced a high measurable skills rate (82.4%) compared to the national average (31.4%). In the future, there will be more reporting on credential numbers and credential rates throughout the territories.

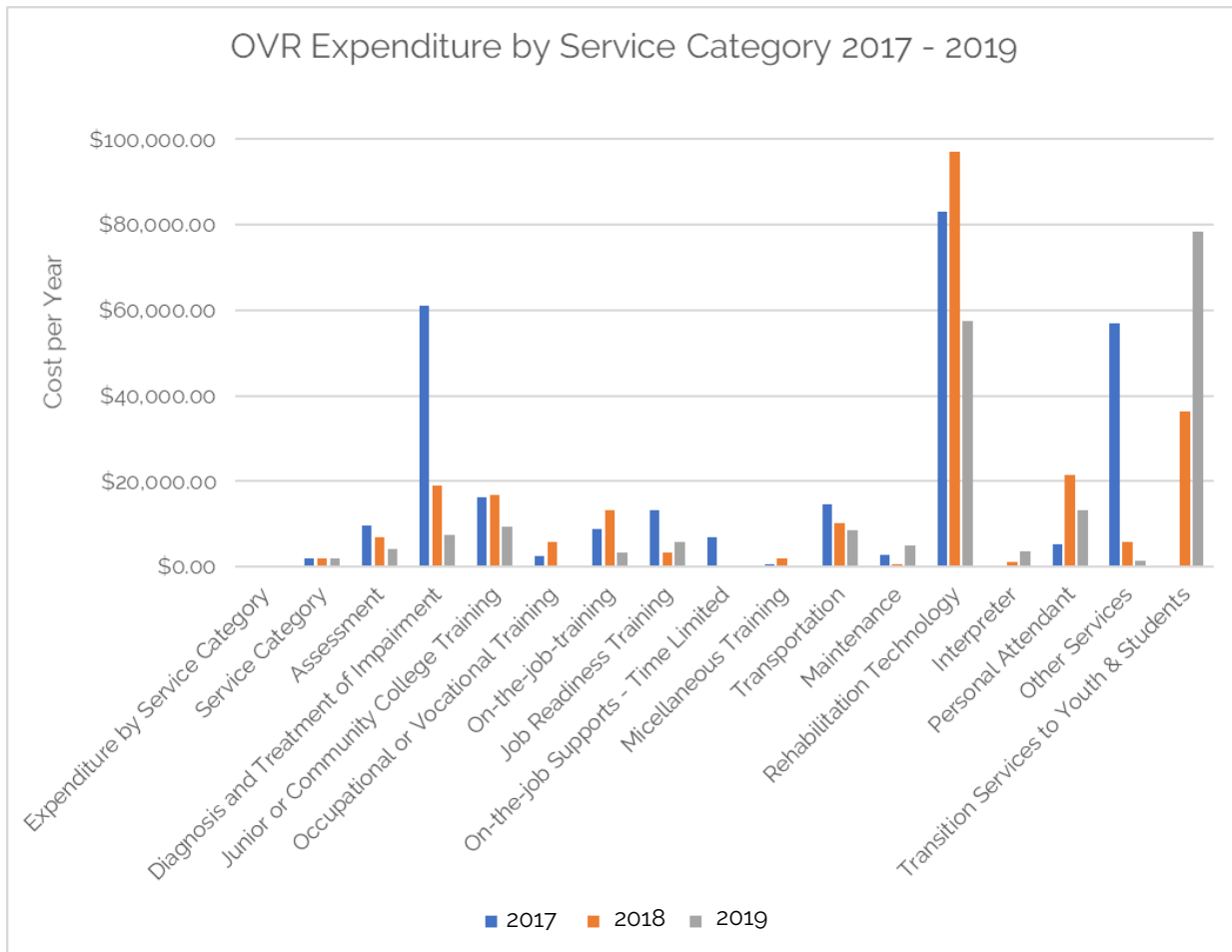
Case Service Expenditures

OVR provided the following data and indicated the funding breakdown for the various types of services offered for vocational rehabilitation present in Table 11 and Figure 4.

TABLE 11: EXPENDITURE BY SERVICE CATEGORY FOR YEARS 2017 – 2019

EXPENDITURE BY SERVICE CATEGORY			
SERVICE CATEGORY	AMOUNT SPENT PER YEAR		
	2017	2018	2019
Assessment	\$ 9,569	\$ 6,828	\$ 4,082
% of Total Per Year	3.40%	2.85%	2.06%
Diagnosis & Treatment of Impairment	\$ 60,991	\$ 18,887	\$ 7,513
% of Total Per Year	21.67%	7.88%	3.79%
Junior or Community College Training	\$ 16,245	\$ 16,824	\$ 9,453
% of Total Per Year	5.77%	7.02%	4.77%
Occupational or Vocational Training	\$ 2,400	\$ 5,809	\$
% of Total Per Year	0.85%	2.42%	0.00%
On-the-job-training	\$ 8,799	\$ 13,322	\$ 3,281
% of Total Per Year	3.13%	5.56%	1.66%
Job Readiness Training	\$ 13,154	\$ 3,466	\$ 5,958
% of Total Per Year	4.67%	1.45%	3.01%
On-the-job Supports - Time Limited	\$ 6,900	\$ -	\$ -
% of Total Per Year	2.45%	0.00%	0.00%
Miscellaneous Training	\$ 596	\$ 2,087	\$
% of Total Per Year	0.21%	0.87%	0.00%
Transportation	\$ 14,704	\$ 10,137	\$ 8,712
% of Total Per Year	5.22%	4.23%	4.40%
Maintenance	\$ 2,776	\$706	\$ 5,020
% of Total Per Year	0.99%	0.29%	2.53%
Rehabilitation Technology	\$ 83,112	\$ 96,952	\$ 57,596
% of Total Per Year	29.53%	40.43%	29.07%
Interpreter	\$ -	\$ 1,057	\$ 3,583
% of Total Per Year	0.00%	0.44%	1.81%
Personal Attendant	\$ 5,243	\$ 21,535	\$ 13,200
% of Total Per Year	1.86%	8.98%	6.66%
Other Services	\$ 57,008	\$ 5,755	\$ 1,486
Percent of Total Per Year	20.25%	2.40%	0.75%
Transition Services to Youth & Students	\$ -	\$ 36,451	\$78,273
Percent of Total Per Year	0.00%	15.20%	39.50%
Total	\$ 281,497	\$ 239,816	\$ 198,157

FIGURE 4: GRAPH OF OVR EXPENDITURE BY CATEGORY 2017 - 2019



Trends show historically, "rehabilitation technology" is the costliest revenue expenditure in both 2017 and 2018. While "rehabilitation technology" was still the second-highest expenditure in 2019, "transition services to youth & students" became the highest expenditure in 2019. "Transition services to youth and students" became a new line item in 2018 and steadily grew in both 2018 and 2019. Diagnosis and treatment of impairment experienced a significant drop between 2017 (\$60,991) to 2018 (\$7,513). When assessing all of the training-related expenditures for 2017 (\$41,194), 2018 (\$60,200), and 2019 (\$18,692), total spending used for training increased between 2017 to 2018 (15.0% to 25.1%, respectively) but decreased in 2019 (9.4%).

Individuals with Disabilities (IWD) Survey and OVR General Performance

In early 2021, the individual survey (IWD survey) was distributed randomly to OVR current and past clients by mail, online via email to the OVR client listserv, and online via OVR's Facebook. A total of 88 individuals participated in the survey. As there was no notable difference in responses between the randomized sample and the online responses, all were combined in the aggregate. Trends in respondent data may be more reflective of 2021's economic climate (i.e., the time applicants responded to the survey) as compared to data from the previous section (i.e., 2017 – 2019).

Demographics of IWD Survey Respondents

The following indicate characteristics of those who completed the 88 individuals who completed the paper and online survey. A larger percentage of females responded to the survey than males. This is the reverse of the general consumer population for OVR.

TABLE 12: GENDER OF RESPONDENTS FOR IWD SURVEY (N=88)

INDIVIDUAL RESPONDENT GENDER	%
Male	37.5%
Female	56.8%
Transgender	1.1%
Prefer Not to Answer	4.5%

TABLE 13: LOCATION OF RESPONDENTS FOR IWD SURVEY BY ISLAND(N=88)

INDIVIDUAL RESPONDENT LOCATION	%
Saipan	77.3%
Tinian	8.0%
Rota	14.8%

TABLE 14: RESPONDENTS FOR IWD SURVEY BY ETHNICITY(N=87)

INDIVIDUAL RESPONDENT ETHNICITY	#	%
Chamorro	37	42.5%
Pacific Islander (Multiple Ethnicities within Pacific Islands)	14	16.1%
Filipino	14	16.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander (Multiple Ethnicities within Pacific Islands and Asia)	6	6.9%
Pacific Islander/White	3	3.4%
Carolinian	3	3.4%
Federated States of Micronesia (Kosraean, Pohnpeian, Chuukese)	3	3.4%
Korean	3	3.4%
Palauan	3	3.4%
White	1	1.1%

Respondents selected their identified ethnicities; multiple responses were permitted. The ethnic group most represented in the data set was Chamorro. Pacific Islander (multiple ethnicities), Filipino, and Asian/Pacific Islander (multiple ethnicities) were also well represented. The varying ethnic representation is reflective of the community of the CNMI at large.

TABLE 15: PRIMARY DISABILITY OF RESPONDENTS (N=87)

PRIMARY DISABILITY	#	%
Cognitive or developmental	22	25.3%
Blindness or visually impaired	16	18.4%
No impairment	13	14.9%
Deaf or Hard of Hearing	11	12.6%
Mobility or physical	11	12.6%
Other	7	8.0%
Mental Health	6	6.9%
Communication	1	1.1%

Respondents were asked to select their primary disability, along with other questions about additional disabilities. In terms of primary disability, cognitive or developmental disabilities accounted for 25.3% of respondents, with representation also from those whose disability was blindness or visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, and mobility or physical. There were a considerable number of respondents who replied "no impairment." The project team grouped responses into the above categories based on clearly associated responses.

TABLE 16: RESPONDENTS ASSOCIATION WITH OVR (N=87)

WHICH STATEMENT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR ASSOCIATION WITH THE OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (OVR)?	%
I am a current client of OVR	59.8%
I am a previous client of OVR, but my case has been closed	33.3%
I am a person with a disability, but I have never been an OVR client.	6.9%

Responses to the survey may lean biased towards those associated with OVR, as many respondents are current or past clients of OVR (93.1%) compared to those who have not sought services (6.9%). The project team will supplement findings in focus groups to account for those with disabilities who may not be associated with OVR.

TABLE 17: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO WERE EMPLOYED (N=88)

ARE YOU CURRENTLY EMPLOYED OR SELF -EMPLOYED?	%
Yes	45.5%
No	54.5%

While most respondents were not currently employed (54.5%), a large portion of respondents was employed (45.5%). The high number of successfully employed individuals may indicate the high number of respondents who are current or past clients of OVR.

Barriers Identified by IWD Survey to Accessing Employment and Employment-related Goals

Respondents were asked a series of "yes" or "no" questions related to potential barriers related to employment goals. The percentage of respondents who identified a barrier was impeding their employment goals is listed below.

The highest perceived barrier in the 2021 IWD survey for the entire population was a "lack of job search skills" (45.5%), followed by "not enough jobs" (39.8%). These two barriers may be related, as the perceived decrease in the availability of employment may be impacting the difficulty in searching for jobs. Additional top-ranked barriers include language barriers (34.10%), lack of disability-related accommodations (34.10%), and lack of education or training (33.0%).

When comparing the answers between the entire population who answered the survey compared to the respondents who specifically answered "no" to "are you currently employed or self-employed," the rank of top barriers remains mostly consistent. However, the percentage of those who indicated they experienced each barrier was higher per category as compared to the

entire population except for those who noted "mental health," "concerns on impact on SSI or SSDI," and "lack of childcare."

TABLE 18: BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING EMPLOYMENT GOALS FOR TOTAL RESPONDENTS (N=88) COMPARED TO THOSE WHO ANSWERED "NO" IF CURRENTLY EMPLOYED OR SELF-EMPLOYED (UNEMPLOYED) (N=48)

BARRIER TO ACHIEVING EMPLOYMENT GOALS	RANK OF TOP BARRIER FOR TOTAL	% OF TOTAL WHO INDICATED AS A BARRIER	RANK OF TOP BARRIER FOR UNEMPLOYED	% OF UNEMPLOYED WHO INDICATED AS A BARRIER
Lack of job search skills	1	45.5%	1	66.7%
Not enough jobs	2	39.8%	2	50.0%
Language barriers	3	34.1%	2	50.0%
Lack of disability-related accommodations	3	34.1%	6	43.8%
Lack of Education or training	5	33.0%	2	50.0%
Employers' Perceptions/attitudes	5	33.0%	7	41.7%
Lack of job skills	7	30.7%	5	45.8%
Other transportation issues	8	23.9%	8	25.0%
Other health issues	9	17.0%	9	20.8%
Other	9	17.0%	9	20.8%
Lack of disability-related personal care	11	13.6%	11	14.6%
Mental health issues	12	12.5%	13	12.5%
Issues with housing	13	11.4%	11	14.6%
Lack of disability-related transportation	14	9.1%	14	10.4%
Concerns on impact on SSI or SSDI	14	9.1%	15	8.3%
Lack of childcare	16	8.0%	17	6.3 %
Substance abuse	17	5.7%	15	8.3%

TABLE 19: COMPARISON OF BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING EMPLOYMENT GOALS AS COMPARED TO 2017/2018 CSNA

BARRIER TO ACHIEVING EMPLOYMENT GOALS	RANK OF TOP BARRIER FOR 2020 CSNA	% REPORTED BARRIER IN 2020 CSNA	RANK OF TOP BARRIER FOR 2018 CSNA	% REPORTED BARRIER IN 2018 CSNA
Lack of job search skills	1	45.50%	4	35.6%
Not enough jobs	2	39.80%	8	27.4%
Language barriers	3	34.10%	12	23.3%
Lack of disability-related accommodations	4	34.10%	6	32.9%
Lack of education or training	5	33.00%	1	47.9%
Employers' perceptions/attitudes	6	33.00%	2	43.8%
Lack of job skills	7	30.70%	9	26.0%
Other transportation issues	8	23.90%	5	35.6%
Other health issues	9	17.00%	7	32.9%
Other	10	17.00%	*N/A	
Lack of disability-related personal care	11	13.60%	13	20.5%
Mental health issues	12	12.50%	3	41.1%
Issues with housing	13	11.40%	11	26.0%
Lack of disability-related transportation	14	9.10%	14	15.1%
Concerns on impact on SSI or SSDI	15	9.10%	10	26.0%
Lack of childcare	16	8.00%	15	11.0%
Substance abuse	17	5.70%	16	8.2%

While there cannot be a direct comparison between the 2020 CSNA and the 2017/2018 CSNA because different people responded to the surveys, it can be informative to see changes in perception over the 3-year period. For instance, "not enough jobs" was indicated as the second-highest barrier in 2021 (39.8%), as compared to the 8th highest barrier in 2017/2018 (27.4%). Additionally, "lack of education" and "employers' perceptions or attitudes" were perceived as more significant barriers in 2017/2018, while "lack of job search skills" and "language barrier" had a greater impact in the 2021 survey.

Barriers to Accessing OVR Services

Respondents noted very few barriers to accessing OVR resources, even compared to respondents of the 2017/2018 CSNA. This may indicate bias, as most respondents were already associated with OVR as a client or as a former client. The data suggest that OVR staff do a good job assessing and limiting barriers to services once a client becomes a part of the OVR pipeline of consumers.

TABLE 20: RESPONDENTS' BARRIERS TO ACCESSING OVR SERVICES.

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING OVR	%
Other challenges related to the physical location of the OVR office	14.8%
Limited accessibility to OVR via public transportation	12.5%
Difficulties scheduling meetings with counselor	9.1%
Language barriers	9.1%
Lack of disability-related accommodations	8.0%
Difficulties completing the Individualized Plan for Employment	5.7%
Difficulties completing the OVR application	5.7%
Other challenges not already mentioned	4.5%
Other difficulties working with OVR staff	3.4%

Respondents were asked the open-ended question, “What changes to OVR services might improve your experience with OVR and help achieve your employment goals?” Out of the 71 respondents, over half of the responses indicated “no changes,” gave positive remarks about OVR, or showed no suggestions for improvement:

- No changes (N = 26)
- Positive remarks about OVR services (N=8)
- N/A, no comment, or unsure (N =6)

The remaining respondents varied in their suggestions for improvements. While these numbers were in the minority of responses, suggestions for improvement did arise in focus group discussions around the various topics:

- More clarity from staff regarding various OVR programs and eligibility (N=5)
- Other (N = 5)
- Faster processing for services/assistive technology (N=3)
- More on-the-job training or work experience opportunities (N=3)
- More job skills training (N=3)
- Changing location of OVR Office(s) (N=3)
- More communication/consistency from OVR Staff (N=3)
- More support from OVR staff (N=2)
- More staff (N=1)
- More vendors (N=1)
- Support with childcare (N=1)
- Adjusting to federal program eligibility changes (N=1)

Focus Group Interviews and OVR General Performance

The following themes regularly emerged from the focus groups with individuals with disabilities, disability network partners, and the OVR staff as related to the overall program performance for OVR:

- OVR has made significant strides in the last three years in increasing levels of communication between OVR clients and caseworkers. While challenges with lengthy procurement delays still exist, the improved communication has helped decrease frustration levels as consumers await services.
- The OVR team identifies that significant challenges to providing services are predominantly external, including long procurement delays, reliability of funding sources, and community barriers due to current economic circumstances.
- Participants in focus groups were overwhelmingly appreciative of the support they had received from OVR staff, noting that the support of the staff had helped them overcome personal struggles to move forward with their employment goals.
- There were many indications from current OVR clients and past clients regarding confusion around the wide array of OVR services and eligibility requirements for various OVR programming. They noted this confusion was potentially a barrier to accessing services for themselves and other people with disabilities.
- As community challenges in 2021 (e.g., COVID-19, downturn economy) increase the number of cases, disability network partners noted an observed shortage of OVR counselors to

address the demand. Partners noted at times, caseworkers appeared overwhelmed, and on occasion, this was observed served by clients. Respondents identified that more counseling staff for intake and support staff would address the issue.

- Some disability network partners felt disconnected from OVR and its services. They suggested that better collaboration with partner agencies would expand outreach opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
- Additional themes arose around the need for soft skills and self-confidence training in focus groups and survey responses. Barriers such as lack of confidence, fear of failure in the workplace, and fear of what would happen on the job site were cited as barriers to employment in focus groups.
- Partners recommended that having inventory on-island for higher demand AT that had already been undergone the procurement process may alleviate long wait times.
- Focus groups noted that there had been a concentrated effort by OVR to expand its presence in the community, most significantly through social media. These interactions were thought to be a net positive in showcasing which businesses and potential employers may be interested in hiring people with disabilities. Participants from multiple focus groups recommended utilizing social media to highlight individual stories of those participating in OVR's programs to help destigmatize perceived employment barriers for individuals with disabilities and encourage more employers to participate.

Overall Observations for OVR Performance:

- Staff responsiveness to current consumers improved as compared to themes in the 2017/2018 CSNA.
- Changes in community factors may influence current employment barriers, meaning programs and casework may need to shift to adapt to current needs (e.g., job search skills, availability of jobs).
- Language barriers were more strongly identified as a barrier to employment in the 2020 CSNA. OVR needs to do further analysis of its client base to access which language barriers impact employment (e.g., related to disability, native language). After further investigation, OVR can address these barriers (e.g., access to language-related assistive technology, translators, English as a second language) training to accommodate needs.
- Respondents from Rota and Tinian were satisfied with the level of services they received from OVR, which is an improvement compared to the 2017/2018 CSNA.
- Individuals with disabilities, including past or current clients of OVR, did not understand the components of all of OVR's programming.
- OVR experienced a decrease in the average rehabilitation rate of clients as compared to the 2017/2018 CSNA.
- Respondents were overall satisfied with the services they were receiving from OVR. However, as caseloads increase due to community factors, there may be a need to hire more staff to address the current economic impacts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are presented to OVR based on the results of the research in the Overall Agency Performance:

- OVR should continue outreach efforts and provide clarity on the various programs and services for vocational rehabilitation. This includes eligibility criteria for specific programming. Outreach could occur via enhanced, accessible media outlets (e.g., videos, pamphlets, OVR website, interactive questionnaires) and translated into multiple languages. Outreach could be for both individuals with disabilities and the general community. Family members and colleagues who do not have a disability would be aware of services and could more readily share with those with disabilities. Additionally, OVR could conduct outreach and strengthen partnerships with disability network providers to leverage the capacity of partners.
- OVR should continue to promote and clarify eligibility requirements for the self-employment program, as the availability of jobs was indicated as a major barrier to employment across the CNMI (Saipan, Tinian, and Rota).
- OVR could re-evaluate the role of counselors as compared to "career coaches," who could specialize in encouraging rehabilitation and increasing confidence in clients. Potential changes could include all counseling staff being trained as career coaches or identifying specific staff for this purpose.
- OVR could highly encourage all consumers with open cases to participate in semi-annual, accessible training modules. Highly

encouraging participation in job skills training, job search skills training, soft skills training, job readiness training, and confidence-boosting programming—even for clients currently rehabilitated—would give clients the tools needed to enter the job market and retain their positions.

- Further expand the OVR's positive social media outreach by highlighting individuals who are succeeding in their vocational rehabilitation goals. This messaging would show both individuals with disabilities and employers examples of success within our community.
- There needs to be a renewed focus on identifying and addressing language barriers preventing applicants from achieving employment.
- OVR could work with the CNMI Legislature on realistic funding, and staffing needs to address the increased demands on the Office to address budget shortfalls.
- OVR should focus on the rehabilitation rate of clients, noting this as an area of improvement over the coming years.
- OVR could consider hiring more staff to address increasing caseloads for counselors, the need for additional outreach, and a designated individual to work with businesses on their employment needs.

SECTION TWO: VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION NEEDS OF IDENTIFIED COMMUNITIES

This section assesses the needs of targeted populations identified by the CSNA as potentially most marginalized communities for vocational rehabilitation. Targeted populations include those with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment; individuals in underserved or unserved communities; youth in transition, and those served through the WIOA-funded Programs.

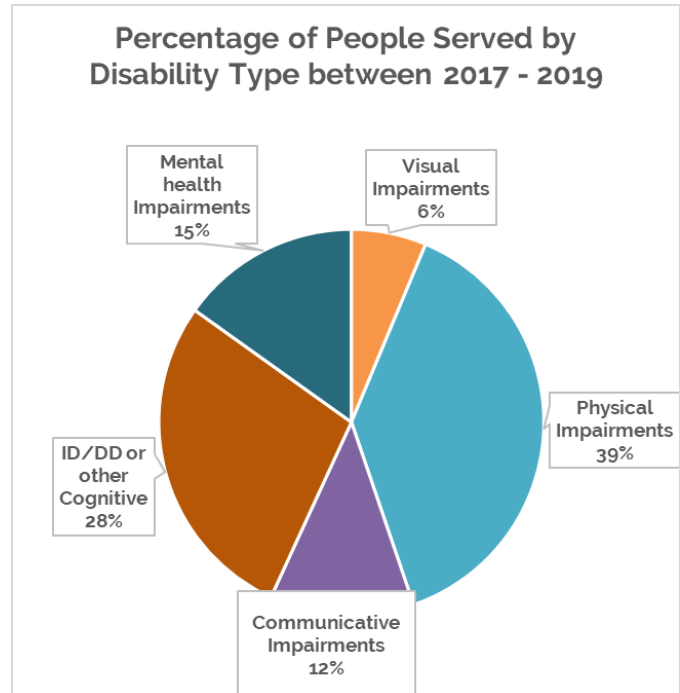
Reoccurring themes in providing services for marginalized communities

- OVR has increased in counseling services to those considered underserved and unserved in remote locations.
- OVR faces barriers in providing services to some subsections of marginalized communities due to external factors such as eligibility requirements for grant programs and limited resources for specific demographics.
- OVR has limited resources but is faced with increasing demand to provide disability-related services. To bridge the gaps in services caused by external factors, OVR could increase its bandwidth by leveraging hiring additional staff for both counseling and administration and leverage the resources of disability network partners

Part A: Those with Most Significant Disabilities, Including Their Need for Supported Employment

Part A dives deeper into the needs of those with the most significant disabilities and their employment needs. This section includes data from OVR, responses from focus groups, and specific questions asked via survey for disability network partners and staff. Additionally, this section elaborates on the needs identified around supported employment. Supported employment provides people with the most severe disabilities the appropriate, ongoing support necessary for success in the work environment.

FIGURE 5: OVR DATA REGARDING DISABILITY TYPE



Recurring Themes Across all Data Collection Methods

- Changes to the supported employment (S.E.) eligibility have affected OVR's ability to expend S.E. funds.
- OVR consumers indicated "loss of SSI or SSDI funding" did not rank highly as a barrier to employment; however, disability network partners and OVR staff shared this was still challenging for many.
- There are not enough local vendors or specialized professionals to meet the assistive technology, personal attendant, and interpreter needs for those with the most significant disabilities.

Demographic of OVR Clients by Disability Type and Significance of Disabilities

Figure 5 demonstrates the primary disability-type of the overall population of those served by OVR averaged from 2017 to 2019. Table 21 below shows the types of disabilities served from 2017-2019, along with rehabilitation rates.

TABLE 21: CASES CLOSED AND REHABILITATION RATES BY DISABILITY TYPES

DISABILITY TYPE	YEAR	TOTAL # OF CASES SERVED	# OF CASES CLOSED OTHER THAN REHABILITATED	# OF CASES CLOSED REHABILITATED	REHABILITATION RATE	MEDIAN EARNINGS OF CLOSED AND SUCCESSFULLY REHABILITATED	AVE. COST OF ALL CASES
Visual Impairments	2017	19	2	7	77.78%	\$13,624.00	\$1,225.34
	2018	18	0	2	100.00%	\$16,536.00	\$97.30
	2019	13	3	0	0.00%	\$0.00	\$87.70
Physical Impairments	2017	103	15	10	40.00%	\$22,412.00	\$982.07
	2018	102	7	10	58.82%	\$19,791.20	\$769.41
	2019	100	22	8	26.67%	\$29,088.80	\$700.14
Communicative Impairments	2017	30	5	10	66.67%	\$17,030.00	\$828.06
	2018	29	2	5	71.43%	\$14,872.00	\$941.73
	2019	37	5	11	68.75%	\$22,880.00	\$1,081.43
ID/DD or other Cognitive	2017	76	8	4	33.33%	\$13,624.00	\$281.94
	2018	74	7	6	46.15%	\$14,664.00	\$223.43
	2019	72	16	5	23.81%	\$15,080.00	\$180.71
Mental health Impairments	2017	39	5	0	0.00%	\$0.00	\$512.78
	2018	39	7	2	22.22%	\$15,249.52	\$233.40
	2019	42	4	0	0.00%	\$0.00	\$440.55

The highest percentages served were physical impairments, followed by intellectual/developmental or other cognitive impairments. Visual impairments were the lowest percentage of those served. Rehabilitation rates tended to be highest for those with visual impairments (excluding 2019 and potentially due to lower numbers served), followed by those with communicative impairments. Median salary earnings were highest for those with physical impairments, with an all-period high of \$29,088.00 in 2019. Those with mental disabilities consistently had the lowest rates of rehabilitation.

To understand the demographic of OVR clients, Table 21 highlights the total number of those considered disabled, those with significant, and those with the most significant disabilities from 2017 – 2019. Those with the most significant disabilities consistently rose from 36.07% to 43.64% over the three-year period.

TABLE 21: SIGNIFICANCE OF DISABILITY TYPE FOR ALL OVR CONSUMERS

SIGNIFICANCE OF DISABILITY	2017	2018	2019
Disabled	4	3	8
% of total	6.56%	4.76%	14.55%
Significant	35	37	23
% of total	57.38%	58.73%	41.82%
Most Significant	22	23	24
% of total	36.07%	36.51%	43.64%

TABLE 22: TRENDS IN SIGNIFICANCE OF DISABILITY BY DISABILITY TYPE (D=DISABLED, SD = SIGNIFICANT DISABILITY, MSD = MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITY)

DISABILITY TYPE	YEAR	APPLICATIONS AND ELIGIBILITY				SIGNIFICANCE OF DISABILITY					
		# OF APPS	% OF APPS ELIG.	# OF APPS ELIG.	AVE. TIME FOR ELIG. DETERMINATION	# of D	D % OF TOTAL	# of SD	SD % OF TOTAL	# of MSD	MSD % OF TOTAL
Visual Impairments	2017	4	0%	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	2018	12	25%	3	25	0	0%	2	67%	1	33%
	2019	6	17%	1	15	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Physical Impairments	2017	37	78%	29	59	4	14%	18	62%	7	24%
	2018	42	52%	22	44	1	5%	15	68%	6	27%
	2019	37	43%	16	38	1	6%	10	63%	5	31%
Communicative Impairments	2017	13	77%	10	40	0	0%	10	100%	0	0%
	2018	18	78%	14	38	2	14%	9	64%	3	21%
	2019	19	84%	16	39	6	38%	9	56%	1	6%
ID/DD or other Cognitive	2017	24	75%	18	56	0	0%	5	28%	13	72%
	2018	19	84%	16	41	0	0%	9	56%	7	44%
	2019	21	67%	14	41	0	0%	3	21%	11	79%
Mental health Impairments	2017	6	67%	4	44	0	0%	2	50%	2	50%
	2018	9	89%	8	46	0	0%	2	25%	6	75%
	2019	16	50%	8	70	1	13%	1	13%	6	75%

In Table 22, people with physical impairments consistently submit the highest number of new applications over the three-year period. However, invariably, the highest reported cases for labeled “most significant” are for either “intellectual and developmental disabilities or other cognitive impairments.” Additionally, “mental health impairments” have a high percentage of most significant cases, and in 2019, the average time was for eligibility determination was 70 days (above the mandated 60-day threshold).

Supported Employment

Supported employment refers to service provisions wherein people with the most significant disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, mental health, and traumatic brain injury, among others, are assisted with obtaining and maintaining employment. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services provided updates and clarifications regarding changes to the Rehabilitation Services Program, as amended by the WIOA. In 2017, CNMI OVR integrated the new eligibility requirements into their outreach efforts; however, they have been unsuccessful in expending supported employment funds due to restricted eligibility since the clarification of regulation. In the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, supported employment was defined as the following:

1. Competitive employment in an integrated setting with ongoing support services for individuals with the most significant disabilities –
 - a) for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred;
or
 - b) for whom competitive employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of significant disability; and
 - c) who, because of the nature and severity of their disabilities, need ongoing support services, including both intensive initial support services and also extended services after a transition from those initial support services to perform work; or,
2. Transitional employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities due to mental illness.

The most critical eligibility requirements include the following:

- Individuals with the most significant disabilities,
- Competitive employment,
- Integrated work setting, and
- Ongoing support services and supported employment services.

Additional federal guidelines indicate that for eligible individuals 25-64, supported employment dollars can be freely expended as long as the dollars spent match dollars spent for those aged 14-24. For qualified consumers age 14-24, a local monetary match must be identified. Due to the more stringent eligibility guidelines and limited availability of local dollars, no new applicants availed of supported employment from 2017 – 2019. The only cases served were a small number of ongoing clients from OVR.

TABLE 23: OVR DATA FOR INDIVIDUALS POTENTIALLY ELIGIBLE FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Significance of Disability	AGE 14 - 24			AGE 25-64		
	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019
Most Significant (# new eligible applications)	15	15	14	7	8	10
% of total new eligible applicants	68.18%	57.69%	77.78%	19.44%	24.24%	29.41%

TABLE 24: OVR DATA FOR PARTICIPANTS IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

ITEMS	SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT		
	2017	2018	2019
Applications	0	0	0
% of apps found eligible	0	0	0
# of apps found eligible	0	0	0
Number of consumers in training by type			
Vocational	0	0	0
Undergraduate	0	0	0
Graduate	0	0	0
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed other than rehabilitated	0	0	0
Cases closed other than rehabilitation	0	0	0
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed rehabilitated	0	0	0
Number of cases closed rehabilitated	0	0	1052
Median earnings of those closed as successfully rehabilitated	0	0	1
Rehabilitation Rate	0	0	0
Total number of cases served	3	1	3
Ave. cost of all cases	\$2,644.36	\$12,052.50	\$9,590.73
Ave cost of cases closed rehabilitated	\$2,195.95	\$12,052.50	\$27,501.00
Ave. cost per case closed unsuccessful	\$2,868.57	\$0.00	\$0.00
Ave. cost per case closed prior to plan	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

Focus group data from OVR staff identified that the availability of professional personal care assistants and job coaches for individuals with the most significant disabilities was one of the major barriers to providing supported employment services. Providing a local match requirement for

individuals aged 14-24 was identified as a barrier, as funding opportunities decreased due to government austerity and economic decline.

Additionally, OVR staff found that individuals who would typically qualify for supportive employment choose to pursue higher education before vocational rehabilitation.

SSA Beneficiaries

Individuals who receive SSI or SSDI are assumed to be eligible for OVR services. Table 25 indicates the number of Social Security Beneficiaries who OVR served between 2017 to 2019. A barrier to employment identified by OVR Staff and other Disability Network Partners was the fear that an individual may lose their SSI or SSDI if they became rehabilitated. The data support this fear. Some of the lowest rehabilitation rates were experienced by people on SSA, averaging 16.6% percent over the three-year period with an all-time low of 6.67% in 2019. When individuals with disabilities were asked if losing their SSA benefits was a barrier to seeking employment, it was ranked 14th on the list of top barriers, with only 9.1% stating that this was a perceived barrier to employment.

These results may mean that OVR needs to further work with the families of those on SSA on the importance of rehabilitation for people with disabilities. Legal guardians and family sponsors should be exposed to the emotional and holistic benefits to people with disabilities engaging in the workplace, not only the monetary gains. OVR also has a relationship with the Northern Marianas Protection and Advocacy Systems, Inc. (NMPASI) to report potential cases of legal guardian abuse.

TABLE 25: OVR DATA BY SSA BENEFICIARIES

ITEM	SSA BENEFICIARIES		
	2017	2018	2019
Applications	18	14	23
% of apps found eligible	88.89%	64.29%	69.57%
# of apps found eligible	16	9	16
Ave. time for eligibility determination	40	53	48
Significance of Disability			
Disabled	0	0	2
% of total	0.00%	0.00%	12.50%
Significant	6	5	6
% of total	37.50%	55.56%	37.50%
Most significant	10	4	8
% of total	62.50%	44.44%	50.00%
% closed prior to IPE development	6.25%	33.33%	25.00%
# closed prior to IPE development	1	3	4
Plans developed	14	4	14
Ave. time from eligibility to plan	40	46	48
Number of consumers in training by type			
Vocational	2	2	0
Undergraduate	7	4	8
Graduate	0	0	0
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed other than rehabilitated	1087	901	1548
Cases closed other than rehabilitated	13	11	14
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed rehabilitated	1046	2050	1052
Number of cases closed rehabilitated	5	2	1

Rehabilitation Rate	27.78%	15.38%	6.67%
Median earnings of those closed as successfully rehabilitated	\$13,624	\$10,738	\$17,451
Total number of cases served	81	70	71
Ave cost of all cases	\$625.20	\$894.04	\$1,081.61
Ave cost of cases closed rehabilitated	\$293.09	\$4,017.50	\$27,501.00
Ave. cost per case closed unsuccessful	\$252.72	\$767.79	\$15.11
Ave. cost per case closed prior to plan	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

Surveys and Focus Group Findings Regarding Most Significant Disabilities

The following information for employment services for those with most significant disabilities from surveys of disability network partners and staff (N = 12)^{***}.

- For employment services provided by OVR and the Rehabilitation Network, the top most “readily available and sufficient” services were transition services for youth with disabilities (66.7%) and career and vocational counseling (58.3%). Less than 10% type of employment services were considered “insufficiently available” or “unavailable.”
- For general public services, services most “readily available and sufficient” were affordable legal services (58.3%) and affordable, accessible public transportation (58.3%).
- For independent living services (e.g., assistance, transportation,

^{***} While the total number of survey respondents for this particular question is far below N=50, a standard number to which would indicate significance, the project team included these numbers to provide some general perspective. The small population of survey data may be skewed.

connecting to others independent living training), almost all categories were ranked “readily available and sufficient.”

- For services across all categories considered “insufficiently available” or “unavailable,” the most noted needs gap was for sign language interpreters (25%).

Additionally, the following themes were present in both survey narratives and focus groups.

- Smaller assistive technology (AT) products like eyeglasses and hearing aids were the most successfully sourced AT for people with the most significant disabilities. The most difficult AT to source were larger, more complex products that not available on island.
- Delays in lengthy procurement processes were a significant barrier to providing specialized AT to individuals with significant disabilities.
- ‘Lack of resources to fund some specialized AT needs was noted as a barrier to serving those with most significant disabilities.
- The lack of interpreters or individuals with specialized skills to serve individuals with the most significant disabilities was considered a significant barrier.
- On Saipan, the Center for Living Independently adequately addresses independent living services. On Tinian and Rota, there is a need for independent living skills, community building, and advocacy.

Recommendations to Address Needs of Individuals with Most Significantly Disabilities

- OVR could develop MOUs with government partners (e.g., Finance, Treasury) to expedite procurement processes for assistive technology. Additionally, OVR could advocate for tax incentives for local business owners to supply specialized AT on island.
- OVR could continue to advocate for more funding for programs that can provide assistive technology, interpreters, and funding for specialized career coaches for those with the most significant disabilities.
- To minimize fears around the loss of SSA benefits, OVR could specifically conduct outreach to family members and legal guardians regarding the holistic benefits and success stories of employment for people with the most significant disabilities. OVR should continue to report cases of potential abuse to NMPASI.
- Career coaching and job exploration for individuals with the most significant disabilities was a gap in services provided. OVR could consider hiring a specialized coach, as their consumer base has a high percentage of individuals with the most significant disabilities. This could best leverage the resources for supported employment.
- OVR should continue its efforts to consistently train counselors on program eligibility guidelines, such as SE and SSA benefits. Consistent training ensures all staff are well aware of the eligibility requirements for SE and minimizes the impact of staff turnover.

Part B: Unserved or Underserved Populations

There were four indicators evaluated to determine populations who may be unserved or underserved in the CNMI:

- Ethnicity and Citizenship status
- Location
- Disability type
- Other challenges

Recurring Themes Across all Data Collection Methods

- Federal regulations limit OVR's ability to expend funding in specific programs to support non-U.S. citizens, a sizeable percentage of the CNMI population.
- Tinian and Rota clients are experiencing more consistent communication from OVR caseworkers, thus reporting satisfaction with services.
- Data indicates that individuals with mental disabilities are underserved.
- Focus groups indicate that veterans may be underserved.
- Survey data indicates that individuals who do not communicate verbally using English are potentially underserved populations.
- The high cost of assistive technology and the availability of locally sourced products are barriers to meeting the needs of those with the most significant disabilities.

Identifying Unserved or Underserved Populations Based on Ethnicity and Citizenship Status

Currently, OVR tracks data based on race for their clients. The below table outlines the statistics for those who received services between 2017 – 2019, categorized by racial identity profile.

TABLE 26: OVR CLIENTS SERVED BETWEEN 2017 – 2019 BASED ON ETHNICITY

ITEM	YEAR	# OF APPS	# OF APPS FOUND ELIG	# PLANS DEVEL-OPED	AVE. TIME FROM ELIG TO PLAN	# OF CASES CLOSED REHABIL ITATED	REHABIL ITATION RATE	MEDIAN EARNINGS OF CLOSED AS SUCCESS-FULLY REHABILITATED	TOTAL # OF CASES SERVED
White	2017	3	2	2	62	1	25.00%	\$31,200.00	13
	2018	2	2	2	29	0	0%	\$0.00	10
	2019	2	0	0	0	2	50%	\$48,620.00	9
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	2017	61	45	37	40	19	43.18%	\$14,976.00	202
	2018	75	48	34	32	19	50.00%	\$15,100.80	203
	2019	74	43	45	52	17	28.82%	\$21,320.00	203
American Indian	2017	0	0	0	0	0	0%	\$0.00	1
	2018	1	0	0	0	0	0%	\$0.00	2
	2019	1	0	0	0	0	0%	\$0.00	2
Asian	2017	20	14	14	26	11	64.71%	\$13,728.00	50
	2018	22	13	9	40	6	66.67%	\$16,005.60	47
	2019	22	12	14	43	5	41.67%	\$17,160.00	50
African American	2017	0	0	0	0	0	0%	\$0.00	1
	2018	0	0	0	0	0	0%	\$0.00	0
	2019	0	0	0	0	0	0%	\$0.00	0

FIGURE 6: AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF OVR CLIENTS SERVED PER YEAR FROM 2017 – 2019 BY RACE

Average Percentage of OVR Clients Served Per Year from 2017 - 2019 by Race

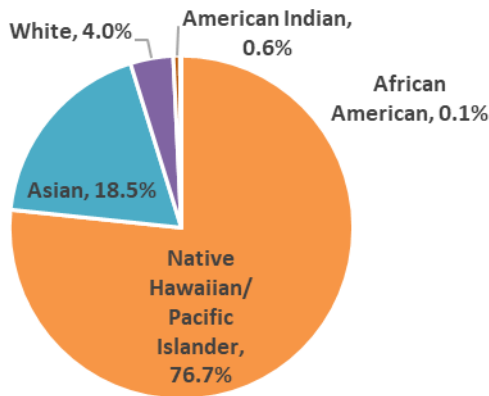


TABLE 27: 2016 HIES DATA RACIAL BREAKDOWN OF CNMI

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION OF CNMI BY RACE	
RACE(S)	% OF POPULATION
Asian (Filipino, Chinese, Other Asian)	54.1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (Chamorro, Carolinian, FSM, Palauan)	43.8%
OTHER	2.1%

Based on the most recent published data from the CNMI Department of Commerce HIES Survey (2016), the Northern Mariana Islands population was 53,890. Table 27 outlines the ethnic breakdown of the population. When comparing OVR data to the population in the CNMI, those who identify as “Asian” may be underserved. “Asians” account for 49.9% of the CNMI population but only represent 18.5% of OVR clients.

Table 28 shows data from a U.S. GAO report presented to the US House of Representatives Natural Resource Committee in 2017.^{viii} In their report, 93.5% or 12,052 foreign workers reported that their country of birth was in Asia. In the 2016 HIES, 29,175 people identified as Asian. This provides a general idea that a significant percentage of people who identify as Asian are also foreign workers or non-US Citizens. Citizenship has a major impact on the ability to provide services through vocational rehabilitation using US

federal dollars. The observation that Asians, specifically Filipinos, may be underserved was also a theme in both focus groups and survey responses from OVR staff and disability network partners.

TABLE 28: GAO-19-376T NUMBERS OF APPROVED CW-1 PERMITS, BY WORKERS' COUNTRY OF BIRTH, FOR FISCAL YEARS 2015 - 2018

Country of birth	2015	2016	2017	2018^a
Philippines	7,186	7,097	6,173	5,793
China	1,231	5,034	5,037	1,748
South Korea	488	433	373	382
Bangladesh	330	484	340	203
Japan	195	144	129	97
All others	260	337	837	772
Total	9,690	13,529	12,889	8,995

Legend: CNMI = Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; CW-1 = CNMI-Only Transitional Worker.

Additionally, focus groups and survey respondents identified that people from the Freely Associated States of Micronesia (FSM), who would be considered a subset of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, were also an underserved ethnic population. Facing similar challenges with citizenship and the use of US federal grant dollars, OVR has faced challenges having the financial resources to support non-US citizens with vocational rehabilitation fully. Survey responses also identified language barriers and culturally appropriate outreach as a barrier to accessing services for these specific populations

Identifying Unserved or Underserved Populations Based on Location

TABLE 29: LOCATION OF RESPONDENTS FOR IWD SURVEY BY ISLAND(N=88)

INDIVIDUAL RESPONDENT LOCATION	%
Saipan	77.3%
Tinian	8.0%
Rota	14.8%

In the survey for individuals with disabilities, respondents were asked, "Have other challenges related to the physical location of the OVR office made it difficult for you to access OVR services?" Out of 88 respondents, only 13 stated that the location of the OVR Office was a barrier to accessing services. Out of 13 respondents who indicated location was a barrier, only three were from Rota or Tinian. This means that 85% of respondents from Rota and Tinian did not see the location of the OVR Office on Saipan as a barrier to accessing resources. This finding is a significant improvement from the 2017/2018 CSNA, which identified Rota and Tinian individuals as underserved.

However, focus groups and survey data from disability network partners and OVR staff still cited that Rota and Tinian were underserved due to the limitations of specialized vendors and health providers located on-island. Affordable public transportation was also a barrier for individuals living in Rota and Tinian. The CNMI Office of Transit Authority, which has a fleet of public, ADA-compliant buses, has become more available to residents in Saipan since 2017. For the 2020 CSNA, Tinian and Rota remain an underserved population for these reasons.

Additionally, focus groups with OVR staff identified that the location of the OVR office in Navy Hill was sometimes a barrier for individuals in Saipan in remote areas. This explains why 77% of the respondents who stated the location of the OVR Office was a barrier were from Saipan. In 2020, OVR successfully acquired grant funding for an official vehicle to better serve remote areas in Saipan. OVR staffing has also increased its number of at-home visits to serve clients better.

Identifying Unserved or Underserved Populations Based on Disability Type

As identified in Table 21 (Page 55), individuals with mental health-related disabilities consistently were the least likely to be rehabilitated and had the overall lowest rehabilitation rates. These low rates align with narratives described in focus groups and data in survey responses that indicated that those with mental health-related disabilities might be an underserved population.

Additionally, those with the most significant disabilities (MSDs) were also considered underserved within survey data from OVR Staff and disability network partners due to strict program eligibility guidelines, the availability of funding, and the availability of assistive technology. MSDs being underserved is evident by the low number of eligible applicants to avail of supported employment services. Additionally, respondents indicated that the higher costs often related to adequately supporting those with the most significant disabilities were barriers to providing services.

Identifying Unserved or Underserved Populations – Other Challenges

Survey data further identified that individuals who do not communicate verbally using English are potentially underserved populations. This population includes those who speak utilizing sign-language, individuals with non-communicative-related disabilities, non-English speakers, and English as a second language speakers.

Veterans who have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) were a new demographic discussed in focus groups as potentially underserved by vocational rehabilitation services. This finding continues to inform the need for expanded access to mental health providers and specialization in veteran-related needs.

General Observations About Unserved and Underserved Communities

- Federal regulations are limiting the ability of non-US citizens to access all programs offered through OVR fully.
- Survey and focus group data indicate clients from Tinian and Rota have specific challenges due to location isolation, such as access to disability-related vendors or specialized professionals. However, they are satisfied or very satisfied with the communication and support from the OVR staff. This indicates that OVR has bridged the gap in providing counseling services to Rota and Tinian, as shown in the 2017/2018 CSNA. However, Tinian and Rota clients still face challenges in location due to the availability of specialized vendors and partner resources. Examples include accessing assistive technology, mental health

services, and general vendor services.

- Data indicates that individuals with mental disabilities are underserved. Responses from focus groups and surveys show that "stigma" and the lack of affordable mental health providers as barriers to addressing needs.
- OVR has not previously been associated with veteran-related services. Still, as there are very few providers on the island servicing Veterans, it calls upon the need to provide these services further through OVR.
- Data from surveys and focus groups identified that barriers to providing resources to those with the most significant disabilities included the following: 1) high cost of assistive technology, 2) accommodations to sufficiently support individuals, 3) the lack of specialized professionals to cater to disability-related needs, 4) the lack of funding for personal attendants, and 5) specialized job coaching/career exploration.

Recommendations to Address Needs for Unserved and Underserved Communities

- To address the needs of those underserved or unserved due to ethnicity or US citizenship:
 - Advocate to the US Congressional Office to amend restrictions to service those who are not of U.S. Citizenship.
 - Work with local CNMI Government to identify funding to serve non-US citizens.
 - Collaborate with ethnic associations (e.g., United Filipino Organizations, Korean Association of Saipan, Chinese Association of Saipan) to outreach to specifically target

- underserved ethnic groups. Ask for assistance in translating and distributing outreach material through associations' networks.
- Provide communication materials in multiple languages, especially languages spoken by people of Asian descent, to reach the underserved population.
 - Conduct outreach efforts over local radio broadcasting stations in multiple languages.
- To address the needs of those underserved or unserved due to location:
 - Continue to provide the same level of enhanced counseling service to clients in Rota and Tinian.
 - Advocate for tax incentives for specialized vendor businesses who serve people with disabilities to relocate or open satellite branches in Rota and Tinian.
 - Support individuals on Rota, Tinian, and Saipan with opportunities for self-employment due to the limited availability of jobs.
 - Continue to provide at-home services for clients located in remote villages within Saipan.
 - To address the needs of those underserved or unserved due to disability type:
 - Utilize disability network partners and other mental health providers for more community resources to expand mental health-related services to clients.
 - Work with disability network providers for outreach initiatives that promote the de-stigmatizing mental-health and cognitive-

- related disorders in the workplace.
- Advocate for tax incentives for mental health providers to attract more professionals locally.
 - Work with the local college to train more personal care attendants to support the needs of those with the most significant disabilities or cognitive disorders.
- To address the needs of those underserved or unserved due to other challenges:
 - Identify which language barriers are impacting OVR clients and address these needs accordingly. This may result in seeking funding to help staff expand language skills in underserved languages. OVR may need to hire a staff member who communicates using American Sign Language (ASL). OVR may also need to obtain more accessible communicative technology and train both staff and clients in how to utilize said technology.
 - Publications from OVR need to be translated into various accessible mediums for all language speakers.
 - OVR could build upon partnerships with Congressional Office and the CNMI Veteran Affairs Office to leverage resources to serve best the veteran community seeking vocational rehabilitation due to ongoing struggles with PTSD.

Part C: Youth with Disabilities in Transition

Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act under title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provide more comprehensive services to support youth and students with disabilities in their transition from high school. The amendments emphasize better helping pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) for youth with disabilities age 14 -24. To meet the requirements of the WIOA, this section will further identify unmet needs and service gaps for transition-aged youth with disabilities age 14 -24 as well as specific needs for students with disabilities age 16 -21 eligible for pre-employment transition services

Recurring Themes Across all Data Collection Methods

- The need for training regarding soft skills, work skills, job readiness, and programs to increase self-confidence was evident across multiple data sources. The "fear of failure" and the unknowns of the job site were also barriers for individuals with disabilities.
- The enhanced visibility of the OVR Pre-ETS outreach and services has helped bridge the gap transitioning students' post-graduation.
- Excessive procurement processes are delaying opportunities for youth to participate in Pre-ETS on-the-job training programs.
- Individuals with disabilities ask for more varied job training opportunities that align with their potential career interests.
- IPE developed for this demographic does not align with average federal mandates.

Agency Specific Data Regarding Youth and Students with Disabilities in Transition

TABLE 30: OVR DATA FOR INDIVIDUALS IDENTIFIED AS TRANSITION

ITEM	TRANSITION		
	2017	2018	2019
Applications	9	12	5
% of apps found eligible	100.00%	91.67%	100.00%
# of apps found eligible	9	11	5
Ave. time for eligibility determination	57	41	27
Significance of Disability			
Disabled	0	0	0
% of total	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Significant	2	6	2
% of total	22.22%	54.55%	40.00%
Most significant	7	5	3
% of total	77.78%	45.45%	60.00%
% closed prior to IPE development	11.11%	18.18%	20.00%
# closed prior to IPE development	1	2	1
Plans developed	7	7	7
Ave. time from eligibility to plan	92	45	147
Number of consumers in training by type			
Vocational	1	0	0
Undergraduate	8	5	13
Graduate	0		0
Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed other than rehabilitated	1350	1430	1485
Cases closed other than rehabilitated	5	4	10

Ave. length of open case (days) for cases closed rehabilitated	1453	2036	1900
Number of cases closed rehabilitated	2	5	5
Rehabilitation Rate	28.57%	55.56%	33.33%
Median earnings of those closed as successfully rehabilitated	\$13,624.00	\$14,664.00	\$15,080.00
Total number of cases served	57	60	51
Ave cost of all cases	\$477.42	\$457.58	\$550.45
Ave cost of cases closed rehabilitated	\$353.31	\$770.92	\$672.72
Ave. cost per case closed unsuccessful	\$334.03	\$79.82	\$141.31
Ave. cost per case closed prior to plan	\$550.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

When reviewing the data, youth in transition lean towards experiencing the most significant disabilities, with 60% of new applicants identifying as those with MSD compared to 40% with significant disabilities over the three-year period. Percentages for applications eligible are higher than other demographics for youth in transition. This positive indicator may mean outreach efforts for this demographic are clearly communicating eligibility needs. It should be noted that the time allotted for IPE development for youth in transition in 2017 and 2019 was 92 and 147 days, respectively. Both of these numbers are over the 90 days allotted in Section 102(b)(3)(F) of the Rehabilitation Act and 34 C.F.R. § 361.45(d). In specifically analyzing the seven (7) plans developed in 2019, 3 out of 7 had excessively long plan development times (i.e., 194 days, 231 days, and 527 days), with caseworkers making multiple efforts to reach out to individuals. Clearly communicating expectations regarding the importance of IPE development may need to be emphasized with this age group in initial intake sessions.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

With updates to the Rehabilitation Act came a required mandate in WIOA and VR programs to expend at least 15% of federal allotment funding on pre-employment transition services. OVR has been expanding its outreach for Pre-ETS to comply with the requirement and best serve youth in transition. This section outlines the needs of youth in the CNMI and their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services; as well as provide an assessment on the needs for transition services and pre-employment transition services and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Services currently provided under the Pre-ETS program include the following:

1. Job exploration counseling
2. Work-based learning experiences
3. Counseling on post-secondary (college or vocational) options
4. Work readiness training
5. Instruction on self-advocacy

As indicated in the "Expenditure by Service" table, "Transition Services to Youth and Students" has grown exponentially since 2017, accounting for 39.5% of all programming expenditures and aligning with federal guidelines.

TABLE 31: PERCENT OF OVR GRANT FUNDING TO SUPPORT TRANSITION SERVICES TO YOUTH AND STUDENTS

CATEGORY EXPENDED	2017	2018	2019
Transition Services to Youth & Students	\$ -	\$ 36,451	\$ 78,273
Percent of Total Per Year	0.00%	15.20%	39.50%
Total	\$ 281,497	\$ 239,816	\$ 198,157

Additional Reauthorization of WIOA Funding

The Rehabilitation Act, as reauthorized in WIOA, also indicates that the following authorized services can be provided if funds remain after the provision of the five required services noted above:

1. Implementing effective strategies to increase the likelihood of independent living and inclusion in communities and competitive integrated workplaces;
2. Developing and improving strategies for individuals with intellectual disabilities and individuals with significant disabilities to live independently, participate in postsecondary education experiences, and obtain and retain competitive integrated employment;
3. Providing instruction to vocational rehabilitation counselors, school transition personnel, and other persons supporting students with disabilities;
4. Disseminating information about innovative, effective, and efficient approaches to achieve the goals of this section;
5. Coordinating activities with transition services provided by local educational agencies under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.);
6. Applying evidence-based findings to improve policy, procedure, practice, and the preparation of personnel to better achieve the goals of this section;
7. Developing model transition demonstration projects;
8. Establishing or supporting multistate or regional partnerships involving

States, local educational agencies, designated State units, developmental disability agencies, private businesses, or other participants to achieve the goals of this section; and

9. Disseminating information and strategies to improve the transition to postsecondary activities of individuals who are members of traditionally unserved populations.

A fiscal forecasting model must be utilized to determine if a VR agency can move from the five required services to the nine authorized services. The fiscal forecasting model identifies the expenditures on the required services and coordination services and then forecasts how much of the remaining funds, if any, can be utilized to pay for authorized services. The project team includes a completed model of movement from the required to authorized services for CNMI below.

This model has been reviewed and approved by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The following model was completed by Lourdes Atalig and Samuel Santos of OVR.

Fiscal Forecasting for OVR for Pre-Employment Transition Services

I. CNMI-Wide Special Education Student Estimates:

2018-2019 Totals: 305

Potentially Eligible (16-21): 235

(data collected from the annual PSS-Special Education Student Data Report)

II. Method used to determine the need for Pre-ETS services:

OVR utilized the results of the 2013/14 and 2017/18 comprehensive statewide needs assessment to identify that pre-employment transition services were a need of students with disabilities in CNMI. All of the five required activities were cited by individuals with disabilities, their families, partner agencies, and OVR staff as needed. In addition, VR continues to identify the needs of students with disabilities via the following methods:

- (1) A Pre-Employment Transition Services Coordinator was explicitly hired to provide Transition as well as Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities who either qualify for the VR program or are potentially eligible for the VR program in the CNMI. The Pre-ETS Coordinator oversees activities at each participating school and develops individualized Pre-ETS technical assistance plans, including completing the community analyses, coordinating local pre-ETS services, and coordinating and collecting data. Compiles and shares information with a variety of audiences, develops products and resources, coordinates requests and responses for technical assistance, and creates trainer and user toolkits. The Pre-ETS Coordinator will also need to be able to apply and teach students specific job skills in a classroom setting, as well as individually. The Pre-ETS Coordinator must be able to provide meaningful job training opportunities for program participants, including paid working experiences, internships, job shadowing, volunteer opportunities, and mentorships. The Pre-ETS Coordinator must also partner with local businesses to seek out job experiences for program participants. The Pre-ETS Coordinator role is to function as a team member while providing instruction and support to individuals with disabilities who are receiving services from OVR. During the school outreaches, the Pre-ETS Coordinator maintains regular communication with SPED teachers, other school personnel as appropriate, and the students who continue to identify their needs to us as we help prepare them for employment and/or post-secondary education.
- (2) March 28-29, 2019, WINTAC and NTAC provided training on Pre-Employment Transition Services on collaboration between the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the PSS Special Education on the provision of Pre-employment transition services.
- (3) Furthermore, OVR is actively involved in discussions with the Disability

Network Partners (comprised of the Council on Developmental Disabilities, University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Northern Marianas Protection & Advocacy Systems, Inc., Special Education Program, Center for Living Independently, Transition Coalition, State Rehabilitation Council, and Statewide Independent Living Council, to name a few), Transition Coalition, and the SRC through its Transition and Assistive Technology Committee on the current needs of students with disabilities. Identifying the needs of students comes from these various programs' perspectives, which give OVR a better understanding of the types of services that must be arranged and made available so that our students are able to successfully transition from high school to the adult world of work and/or post-secondary education.

III. Pre-ETS delivery method:

- (1) Statewide conferences that include all three islands in the CNMI. Currently conducted annually but with the increase in student participation, data is currently being reviewed for the possibility of a Pre-ETS bi-annual conference. The proposed additional conference is anticipated to be offered during the summer break to include Work-Based Learning Experiences. Trainers for the conferences are comprised of VR staff, Disability Network Partners (DNP), and Private Providers. Trainings are currently provided in the following areas:
 - Instruction in Self-Advocacy
 - Workplace Readiness Training
 - Job Exploration Counseling
 - Counseling on Opportunities for Enrollment in Comprehensive Transition or Post- Secondary Education Program
- (2) School-based trainings on Leadership and Self-Advocacy have been provided in group settings by the DNP, with plans to provide the additional four required services at the school sites.
- (3) Partnership with the PSS Cooperative Education Program is currently being finalized to ensure Work-Based Learning Experiences are provided.
- (4) The Pre-Employment Transition Services Coordinator works with the

designated high schools by assisting in planning transition activities, providing technical assistance, and consults with school personnel about students with IEPs or 504 plans as well as vocational planning. The CNMI Public School System (LEA) identifies students with disabilities who may be eligible for pre-employment transition services with OVR and consults with the VRTC/VRC, and facilitates a formal referral to OVR with parental approval.

- (5) Upon completion of the required Pre-ETS forms the Pre-ETS Coordinator will forward the referral to Pre-ETS providers for scheduling.
- (6) Outreach to ensure student awareness of Pre-ETS services are completed through teacher notices (Transition Coalition meetings), school/college/trade school flyers, web-based informational posts (OVR, PSS, and Partner Websites), as well as local print media.

IV. FY 2018 Pre-Employment Target Funds:

Total Grant Award:	\$853,608.00
Reserved 15%:	\$128,041.00
YTD Expenses: Required Activities	\$106,800.44

(1) In FY 2018, CNMI OVR **provided Pre-ETS to 101 students** in the most recent year, and there are an estimated 305 students with disabilities between 16-21 years old in the Commonwealth.

(2) In order to provide Pre-ETS to the 101 students, CNMI OVR spent \$106,800.00, for a **total per student cost of \$1,057.43** (\$106,800.44/101=\$1,057.43).

(3) The number of students for School Year 2019 has increased, based on PSS-Special Education Data; therefore, OVR anticipates an increase in the number of students for Pre-ETS services. As noted previously, the increased outreach, collaboration, and the continuous refinement in its referral process will allow the program to see a significant growth in its number of students served. The Program has provided Workplace Readiness Training and Counseling on the opportunity for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary education program

through contracts with Island Training Solution and NMC Community Development Institute as well as Work-based learning experience for students in the Summer of 2018. The Work Readiness Program would be a seventeen (17) week program utilizing the “Skills to Pay the Bills” curriculum published by ODEP. This would allow for a minimum of 50 to a maximum of 75 students to be served. The estimated costs for providing the WRT based on initial proposals is \$750.00 per student. (17 weeks x 3 hrs. per wk. = 51 hours)

- (4) Based on the information provided above, **the Program can anticipate a minimum of 10% growth in its total number of students served.**

In 2018, the Program served a total of 101 students in Pre-ETS for a total of \$1,057.43 per student cost. The anticipated growth of 10% will have the program serving 111 students statewide.

- 101= 10% growth 111 students at \$1,057.43 = **\$117,374.73**

The anticipated cost estimates are adjusted based on the anticipated additional costs of the RFP for Work Readiness Training.

- 30 students at \$750.00 = **\$22,500**

Total anticipated Pre-ETS expenditure of \$117,374.73 + \$22,500 = **\$139,874.73** for required services.

- (5) Coordination Activities Cost:

Currently, according to the personnel activity log that counselors are utilizing to track Pre-ETS activities, the coordination activity costs for FY 2018 stands at \$2,330. Upon numerous reviews and technical assistance provided by WINTAC regarding the type of activities covered under coordination activities, the Program anticipates an increase in coordination activities. A majority of the increase will be in the airfare and car rental costs for our counselors to attend IEP and trainings in the other two islands (Rota & Tinian) directly relating to Pre-ETS.

Estimated coordination costs:	\$8,992.24
Estimated Required Activities costs:	\$106,800.44
Estimated costs Required and Coordination:	\$115,792.68

- (6) Authorized Activities Cost:

Estimated funds remaining from the minimum reserve available for authorized activities based on the Program's projected expenditures in required and coordination activities:

Minimum Reserve (15%):	\$128,041.00
Projected required and coordination costs:	<u>-\$115,792.68</u>
Remaining for authorized activities.	\$12,248.32

Findings from Focus Group and Survey Data

- Individuals with disabilities in focus groups indicated their lack of soft skills, lack of job skills, lack of confidence, fear of the unknown, and fear of failure were barriers to entering the workforce.
- Employers noted that when they hire youth in transition, they do not appear adequately prepared for the workplace. They also reported a need for ongoing training on soft skills and job performance even after being placed for employment.
- OVR staff identified a barrier to participation in On-the-job training and Work Experience training for youth was transportation. OVR programming does not provide transportation to and from worksites.
- Both OVR staff and employers identified that extensive procurement processes for hiring transition-aged youth were a significant barrier to employment and rehabilitation through the Pre-ETS program. Employers noted that this was an important enough barrier that could impact their participation in the program. The employer cannot adequately plan for their staffing, reasonable accommodations, and support without knowing the timeframe for hiring individuals.

- OVR has good relationship with post-secondary institutions like the Northern Marianas College and the central CNMI Public School System (PSS) to help bridge the transition gap. However, focus groups found that OVR's relationships varied from school to school and teacher to teacher. OVR is continuing to invest in strengthening these relationships at the individual high school level.

Recommendations to Address Needs for Youth and Students with Disabilities in Transition

- When conducting initial meetings with students for their IPE, family members should be included to strengthen the support network. OVR staff should clearly communicate to students and families about the importance of an IPE to limit the number of days for IPE completion.
- Improved communication with special education teachers consistently at each school would maximize support from CNMI PSS. Pre-set scheduling and further advance on outreach efforts and needs from students would better help special education teachers support OVR.
- CNMI PSS and OVR could create a shared curriculum where students would receive credit from participating in training with OVR's OTJ or WET program. Alternatively, CNMI PSS could conduct soft skills training, job skills training, and other trainings traditionally offered by OVR for school credit while also serving OVR's greater purpose.
- Participation in ongoing training efforts for individuals in this age demographic should be highly encouraged for OVR clients. OVR could determine the frequency of trainings (e.g., quarterly, semi-annually) and ensure trainings are accessible to individuals on each island and all disability types.

- OVR could work with inter-agency partners related to the hiring process (i.e., Department of Finance, Department of Treasury, Office of Personnel Management) to create MOUs that expedite the processing of requests for On-the-Job Training (OJT) and Workplace Experience Training (WET) participants.
- OVR could highlight the stories of youth in transition in first-person on their social media accounts to better connect with other youth seeking role models in employment.
- Utilizing the Pre-ETS Coordinator, OVR could create a database of youth in transitions' job and career interests. This listing can be shared with potential employers to connect applicants with available job openings in their interested fields more easily.

Part D: Individuals with Disabilities Served Through Other Components of The Statewide Workforce Development System (WIOA)

The CNMI State Workforce Development System (WIOA) is a tri-agency partnership between OVR, the CNMI Department of Labor's Workforce Investment Agency (WIA), and the Northern Marianas College's Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program. The following data was collected through individual survey responses and focus groups. The language "WIOA Program" will be used to identify services provided by Title I.

Recurring Themes Across all Data Collection Methods

- *The majority of Individuals with disabilities either have not availed of WIOA programming, do not clearly understand the WIOA programming, are unaware of eligibility requirements, and cannot distinguish what constitutes as WIOA-funded programming in the CNMI.*
- *Utilizing one unified software system is a challenge to a fully integrated partnership between OVR, WIA, and ABE.*
- *Businesses who participate in the WIA Program are sometimes thought to be taking advantage of participants and do not extend employment opportunities post-program.*
- *OVR needs to show a greater presence on the State Workforce Development Board.*
- *OVR, WIA, and ABE could leverage the strengths of their agencies through integrated partnerships to best serve individuals with disabilities.*

At this time, OVR does not separately collect or track data on consumers co-enrolled in other agencies' WIOA programming. This issue will be addressed in the recommendations.

Survey Data Regarding Individuals with Disabilities Served Through WIOA

When conducting data gathering for the CSNA, the project team asked targeted questions on surveys for individuals with disabilities regarding their participation in WIOA-funded programs. When surveying individuals with disabilities, only 8.0% of respondents had availed of the WIOA-funded programs. However, for those who had successfully availed of WIOA services (N=7), 71.4% indicated that WIOA helped them find a job.

TABLE 32: IWD SURVEY RESPONSES TO QUESTION "HAVE YOU USED THE SERVICES OF THE WIOA-FUNDED PROGRAMS?"⁴

QUESTION	YES	NO
Have you used the services of the WIOA - funded program? (N=88)	7	81
Was the WIOA-funded program physically accessible to you? (N = 16)	7	9
Was the WIOA program programmatically accessible to you (Did they have assistive technology that worked)? (N = 15)	6	9
Did the WIOA-funded program help you find a job? (N=14)	5	9

⁴ If online applicants answered "no," they were asked no further questions regarding WIOA. Applicants above who answered "No" and went on to further answer questions about WIOA services were through paper applications.

TABLE 33: IWD SURVEY RESPONSES TO WIOA PROGRAM SERVICES USED (N=9)

WIOA Program Services Used	#
Assessment	5
Job placement assistance	4
Training	6
Employment Preparation	5
Other	1

TABLE 34: IWD SURVEY RESPONSES TO HELPFULNESS OF SERVICES OF WIOA-FUNDED PROGRAMS USED (N=13)

HELPFULNESS RATING	#
Very Helpful	8
Somewhat helpful	3
Neither Helpful nor unhelpful	0
Somewhat unhelpful	0
Very Unhelpful	2

Trainings were the most popular services WIOA-funded services utilized, closely followed by assessments and employment preparation. 85% of respondents indicated they were either “very helpful” or “somewhat helpful” with the level of helpfulness of services provided by WIOA-funded programs.

Focus Group and Interview Results Regarding WIOA-funded Programs

Individuals with disabilities were asked in focus groups about perceptions of WIOA-funded services. Almost all participants indicated that they had not availed of WIOA-funded programs or were unsure of what WIOA-funded programs were available to them. Some respondents indicated they had previously participated in Title I Summer programming opportunities or the Title 1 Dislocated Workers program after Typhoon Yutu, but they had not recently availed of services.

OVR Staff indicated when WIA received applicants who had indicated that they had a disability, their case was transferred to OVR. While co-managing cases is the ultimate goal of the unified state plan, because OVR and the CNMI Department of Labor's WIA utilize two separate case management systems, integration has been complex. Therefore, at this time, OVR handles all cases of individuals who indicate they have a disability.

OVR Staff identified that the WIA Program likely had better relationships with specific businesses, and their partnership could be leverage these relationships to employ people with disabilities. However, OVR Staff and business focus groups also identified that some companies might take advantage of the WIA program for compensated labor, with no intention to hire post-program. While OVR clients benefit from gaining experience with these employers, this leads to reopening cases and individuals not transitioning into full-time employment.

Recommendations to Address Needs for Individuals with Disabilities Served Through Other Components of The Statewide Workforce Development System (WIOA)

- OVR, WIA, and ABE should continue to determine a unified platform to assist case management tracking. This first step in co-managing cases with the WIOA Program.
- OVR, WIA, and ABE could provide regular and frequent cross-training for staff on the process flow of co-supporting individuals with disabilities.
- OVR, WIA, and ABE could collaborate on outreach efforts to inform

eligibility guidelines of WIOA-funded services' eligibility for people with disabilities.

- OVR should be more present in the State Workforce Development Board to actively participate in conversations and move the collaborative efforts forward for individuals with disabilities.
- The CNMI State Workforce Development Board (SWDB), in which OVR participates, has created new eligibility requirements to become an "eligible training provider" or business partner for On-the-Job training opportunities.^{ix} With OVR, the WIA Program, and Disability Network Partners all encouraging well-intentioned companies to apply, they can leverage each other's networks and expand the number of opportunities that would lead to long-term employment after transitioning out of WIOA-funded services.

SECTION THREE: COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE CNMI

This section identifies the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) in the CNMI that serve individuals with disabilities. The small number of CRPs identified as a challenge in the 2017/2018 CSNA continues to be a challenge due to population size, isolation of services, and specialization of available providers.

Reoccurring Themes Regarding Community Rehabilitation Program Providers

- The timeliness and availability of assistive technology through vendors and procurement were barriers to receiving vocational services.
- Low-to-no service providers in some specialized fields are a barrier to services.

Observation from Focus Groups and Survey Responses

- Providers servicing those with mental illness and veterans with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder were identified CRP service gaps.
- 91.6% of respondents from disability network and staff surveys stated there “agree” or “strongly agreed” that there was a need to develop recently established CRPs.
- There are no CRPs in Rota and Tinian, making logistics difficult for assistive technology assessments, accessing health-related service providers, and other disability-related needs.
- Lengthy procurement processes were identified as a significant barrier to providing assistive technology services, and that the timeliness of the process may impact agreements between vendors and OVR.

Recommendations

- OVR could work with disability network providers to advocate for tax incentives to expand vendors' availability, especially in Rota and Tinian.
- OVR could develop MOUs with government partners (e.g., Finance, Treasury) to expedite procurement processes for products ordered through community rehabilitation programs.
- OVR could work with the Congressional Office and Office of Veteran's affairs to address mental health-related community rehabilitation needs for veterans with PTSD.
- OVR could participate in efforts to develop recently established CRPs.

SECTION FOUR: NEEDS OF EMPLOYERS AND BUSINESSES

The need for the VR program to engage with the business community and provide services to employers has been included as a standard performance measure for the core partners in WIOA. WIOA moves the conversation from whether VR programs should serve the business community to how well are VR programs are serving this community. Consequently, it will be necessary for every VR program to do a self-assessment of how well they serve employers. The project team is hopeful that this section of the report will be useful to OVR as they evaluate how effectively they are providing services to employers.

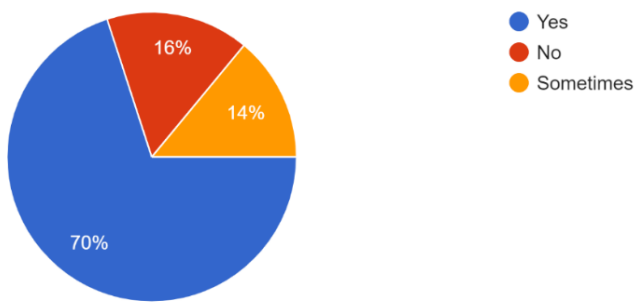
Reoccurring Themes Regarding Community Rehabilitation Program Providers

- Outreach to employers has been a concentrated effort of OVR in the last few years. There is an increase in employers' awareness of OVR; however, most business managers are still unaware of OVR services.
- Most employers were favorable regarding hiring individuals with disabilities, noting they were often more reliable and dedicated to work when provided with a supportive environment and the right opportunities.
- The highest reported fears by employers were how to ask a client about their reasonable accommodations and the fear of legal ramifications.
- Businesses associated with OVR stated that long procurement processes are barriers to partnership for OJT and WET programs.

Observations in Data from Employer/Business Survey Responses

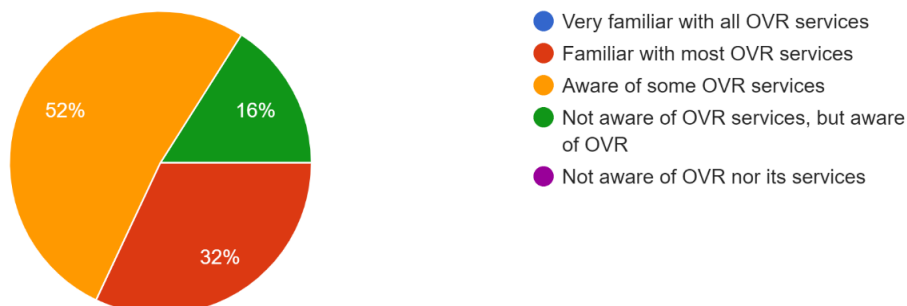
Fifty (50) employers gave their feedback about critical questions related to supporting individuals with disabilities in the workplace, fears and biases' of employers, and resources needed to best advance the disability worker population. 70% of respondents were directly responsible for hiring and or managing employees in their company.

FIGURE 7: EMPLOYER SURVEY- ARE YOU DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HIRING AND/OR MANAGING OF EMPLOYEES IN YOUR COMPANY/ ESTABLISHMENT? (N=50)



When asked about their familiarity with OVR services, 32% of respondents were familiar with most OVR services, 52% were aware of some OVR services, and only 16% were not aware of OVR services.

FIGURE 8: EMPLOYER SURVEY- HOW FAMILIAR ARE YOU WITH THE SERVICES OF THE CNMI OVR? (N=50)



The majority of respondents (51%) had sought information about OVR services but have not utilized those services. The second-highest percentage (22.4%) had no awareness of OVR services, followed by those who had used OVR services in the past and intend to use in the future (20.4%) and those currently utilizing OVR services (6.1%)

FIGURE 9: EMPLOYER SURVEY- HAVE YOU UTILIZED OVR SERVICES IN THE PAST OR AT PRESENT? (N=49)



Regarding OVR's reputation within the business community, 60.4% of respondents indicated that OVR was "highly" or "well" regarded. 37.5% indicated that OVR and its services were not well known. Only 2.1% indicated that services were poorly regarded within the business community.

FIGURE 10: EMPLOYER SURVEY - ON A SCALE OF 1-5 (5 BEING THE HIGHEST), HOW WOULD YOU RATE OVR'S REPUTATION WITHIN THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY? (N=48)



TABLE 35: EMPLOYER SURVEY - HAVE YOU UTILIZED ANY OF THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO YOU IN RELATION TO HIRING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?

EMPLOYERS PERCEPTIONS: RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT HIRING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES			
	NO, AND I WAS NOT AWARE OF THIS SERVICE	NO, BUT I AM AWARE OF THIS SERVICE	YES
Recruiting job applicants who are people with disabilities	30.0%	50.0%	20.0%
Support in discussing, obtaining, or financing reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities	46.9%	36.7%	16.3%
OVR funding to pay for On-the-Job training of OVR consumers	38.8%	44.9%	16.3%
Helping workers with disabilities to retain employment	34.7%	51.0%	14.3%
OVR professional training and consultation on employing individuals with disabilities for employers	36.7%	51.0%	12.2%
Training or support with disability-related legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act]	43.8%	45.8%	10.4%
Staff sensitivity training regarding working with employees with disabilities	46.9%	42.9%	10.2%
Obtaining information on training programs available for workers with disabilities	44.9%	44.9%	10.2%
Tax Incentives for hiring people with disabilities (e.g., Disabled Access Credit, Barrier Removal Tax Deduction, Work Opportunity Tax Credit)	65.3%	28.6%	6.1%

Data in Table 35 demonstrates how employers responded when asked about their awareness and use of disability-related resources. Services most used by respondents were “recruiting job applicants who are people with disabilities (20.0%). The least known resource was tax incentives for hiring people with disabilities (65.3%). For most questions, respondents had not used the service, but they were aware of the service.

TABLE 36: EMPLOYER SURVEY - BASED ON YOUR EXPERIENCE, IN GENERAL AND NOT NECESSARILY RELATED TO YOUR CURRENT EMPLOYER, DO YOU BELIEVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING BARRIERS STOP EMPLOYERS FROM HIRING A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY:

EMPLOYERS PERCEPTIONS: BARRIERS THAT STOP EMPLOYERS FROM HIRING A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY					
	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	UNSURE
Employers are unaware of how to handle the needs of employees with disabilities	14.0%	62.0%	14.0%	4.0%	6.0%
People with disabilities rarely apply for jobs	4.0%	54.0%	16.0%	0.0%	26.0%
Employers are afraid they won't be able to discipline or fire a worker with a disability for poor performance because of potential lawsuits	10.0%	54.0%	22.0%	0.0%	14.0%
Employers can't ask about a job applicant's disability , making it hard to assess whether the person can do the job	8.0%	54.0%	24.0%	4.0%	10.0%
Employers are concerned about the extra time that supervisors or co-workers will need to spend to assist workers with disabilities	10.0%	54.0%	26.0%	2.0%	8.0%
Employers are worried about providing reasonable accommodations and the potential costs so workers with disabilities can do their jobs	14.0%	50.0%	24.0%	2.0%	10.0%
Employers fear the potential liabilities associated with employees with disabilities	16.0%	48.0%	26.0%	2.0%	8.0%
Employers are afraid workers with disabilities won't work up to the same standards as other employees	6.0%	44.0%	36.0%	4.0%	10.0%
Employers are worried about other costs , such as increased health insurance or worker's compensation premiums	12.2%	28.6%	40.8%	4.1%	14.3%
Applicants with disabilities don't have the necessary skills and experience for the jobs they apply for	0.0%	26.0%	42.0%	10.0%	22.0%
Employers are concerned about the attitudes of customers towards employees with disabilities	6.0%	34.0%	44.0%	6.0%	10.0%
Applicants with disabilities do not present themselves well in interviews	0.0%	16.0%	46.0%	10.0%	28.0%
Employers are concerned about the attitudes of co-workers towards employees with disabilities	6.0%	30.0%	48.0%	8.0%	8.0%
Employers fear additional paperwork associated with hiring employees with disabilities	4.0%	24.0%	54.0%	2.0%	16.0%
Employers discriminate against job applicants with disabilities	6.0%	20.0%	54.0%	4.0%	16.0%
Applicants with disabilities can't do the basic functions of the jobs they apply for	0.0%	8.0%	60.0%	14.0%	18.0%
Employers believe people with disabilities have poor job performance	2.0%	22.0%	62.0%	6.0%	8.0%
Employers think of workers who develop disabilities as "problem employees"	0.0%	18.0%	62.0%	8.0%	12.0%

In Table 36, respondents were asked if they “strongly agreed,” “agreed,” “disagreed,” “strongly disagreed,” or were “unsure” if a barrier impacted the hiring of individuals with disabilities. Top-ranked barriers respondents “agreed” with were that employers are unaware of how to handle the needs of employees with disabilities (62.0%), people with disabilities rarely apply for jobs (54.0%), employers are afraid they cannot discipline or fire a worker with a disability for poor performance, due to potential lawsuits (54.0%), employers cannot ask about a job applicant’s disability making it hard to assess whether the person can do the job (54.0%), and employers are concerned about the extra time that supervisors need to assist workers with disabilities (54.0%). Barriers that employers most “disagreed” with were that employers think of workers who develop disabilities as “problem employees” (62.0%), people with disabilities have poor job performance (60.0%), and applicants with disabilities can’t do the basic functions of the jobs they apply for (60.0%).

In Table 37, respondents were asked about barriers surrounding retaining employees with disabilities. Top perceived barriers employers “agreed” with were that employers could not ask about a worker’s disability making, it hard to assess whether the person can still do the job (52.0%); employers do not know how to handle the needs of a worker with a disability on the job (48.0%); and employers worry about the cost of providing reasonable accommodations so that workers with disabilities can do their jobs (45.8%). Barriers respondents most “disagreed” with were that workers with disabilities become less dependable (71.4%), workers with disabilities become less dedicated to their jobs (70.0%), and employers think of workers who develop disabilities as “problem employees” (61.2%)

TABLE 37: EMPLOYER SURVEY - BASED ON YOUR EXPERIENCE, IN GENERAL AND NOT NECESSARILY RELATED TO YOUR CURRENT EMPLOYER, DO YOU BELIEVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING BARRIERS STOP EMPLOYERS FROM RETAINING A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY

EMPLOYERS PERCEPTIONS: BARRIERS THAT STOP EMPLOYERS FROM RETAINING EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES					
	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	UNSURE
Employers can't ask about a worker's disability , making it hard to assess whether the person can still do the job	4.0%	52.0%	28.0%	0.0%	16.0%
Employers don't know how to handle the needs of a worker with a disability on the job	10.0%	48.0%	28.0%	0.0%	14.0%
Employers worry about the cost of providing reasonable accommodations so that workers with disabilities can do their jobs	8.3%	45.8%	31.3%	0.0%	14.6%
Employers fear that workers who develop disabilities will become a liability to them	8.2%	34.7%	40.8%	2.0%	14.3%
Employers worry about other costs , such as increased health insurance premiums	8.3%	31.3%	41.7%	0.0%	18.8%
Employers are concerned about attitudes of customers toward the worker with a disability	2.0%	32.0%	48.0%	6.0%	12.0%
Workers with disabilities tend to not have reliable transportation to work	0.0%	24.0%	48.0%	6.0%	22.0%
Workers who are poor performers only get worse once they acquire a disability	0.0%	16.3%	49.0%	4.1%	30.6%
Workers who develop disabilities can no longer do the basic functions of their jobs	0.0%	10.0%	52.0%	8.0%	30.0%
Employers are concerned about attitudes of co-workers toward the worker with a disability	2.0%	26.0%	54.0%	6.0%	12.0%
Workers with disabilities prefer not to return to work	0.0%	4.0%	60.0%	2.0%	34.0%
Employers think of workers who develop disabilities as "problem employees"	6.1%	14.3%	61.2%	2.0%	16.3%
Workers with disabilities become less dedicated to their jobs	0.0%	4.0%	70.0%	8.0%	18.0%
Workers with disabilities become less dependable	0.0%	4.1%	71.4%	8.2%	16.3%

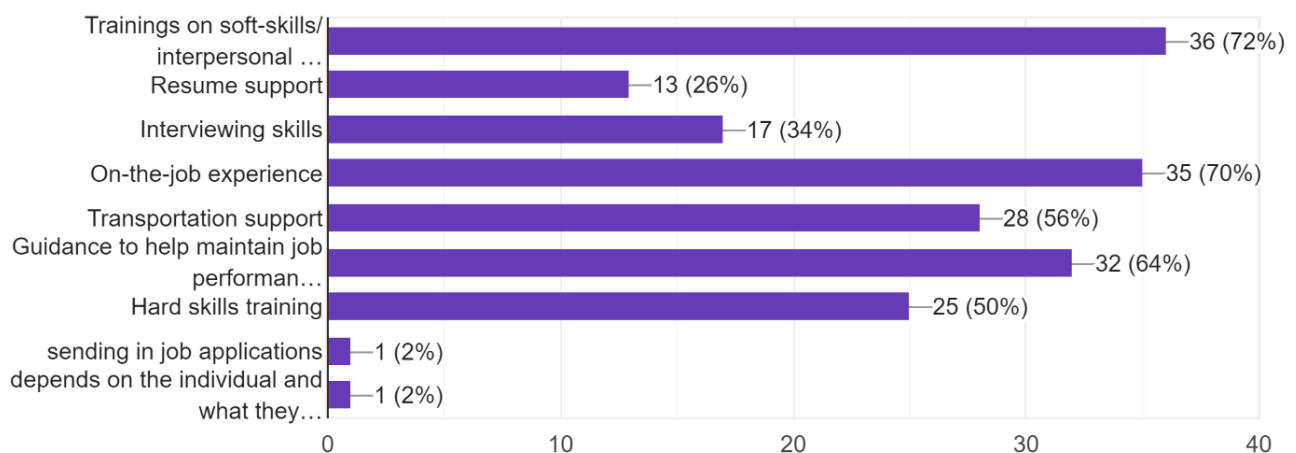
TABLE 38: WHAT WOULD BETTER ASSIST YOUR EMPLOYER IN HIRING OR RETAINING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE CNMI?

EMPLOYERS PERCEPTIONS HOW TO BETTER ASSIST YOUR EMPLOYERS				
	VERY HELPFUL	SOMEWHAT HELPFUL	NOT VERY HELPFUL	NOT HELPFUL AT ALL
A government program to pay for or subsidize reasonable accommodations for workers with disabilities	78.0%	16.0%	6.0%	0.0%
Someone to come in and help solve disability- and accommodation-related issues , without cost to the employer	76.0%	18.0%	6.0%	0.0%
Guidance on disability and accommodation issues	75.5%	18.4%	6.1%	0.0%
An external mediation service to help resolve disability and accommodation issues without recourse to lawsuits	72.0%	20.0%	8.0%	0.0%
More or better training on disability issues for supervisors and managers	71.4%	24.5%	4.1%	0.0%
Salary subsidies for workers with disabilities	70.0%	24.0%	6.0%	0.0%
An easy way to recruit applicants with disabilities to fill vacant jobs	70.0%	28.0%	2.0%	0.0%
Written guidelines for dealing with disability issues, including accommodation requests	68.0%	26.0%	4.0%	2.0%
Tax breaks for hiring or retaining workers with disabilities	68.0%	24.0%	8.0%	0.0%
Assistance with understanding and applying applicable disability laws in the workplace	67.4%	24.5%	8.2%	0.0%
More or better training on disability issues for coworkers	67.4%	26.5%	4.1%	2.0%
An organization-wide system for handling requests for reasonable accommodations	66.0%	26.0%	6.0%	2.0%
A trial initial employment period for workers with disabilities	64.0%	26.0%	10.0%	0.0%
An externally facilitated problem-solving group to address issues of accommodation and retention	62.0%	30.0%	8.0%	0.0%
A diversity specialist who deals with disability issues	60.0%	32.0%	6.0%	2.0%
A central organization-wide source for expertise on accommodation issues	58.0%	30.0%	10.0%	2.0%
A centralized fund within the organization to pay for job accommodations	58.0%	28.0%	12.0%	2.0%
A written company policy of non-discrimination that includes disability	56.0%	34.0%	8.0%	2.0%

When asked what would better assist employers in hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities, the highest-ranked services were related to support with reasonable accommodations. Table 38 shows these services included a government program to pay for or subsidize reasonable accommodations for workers with disabilities (78.0%), someone to come in and help solve disability and accommodation-related issues without cost to the employer, and guidance on disability and accommodation issues (75.5%). However, employers responded that all services surveyed would be “very helpful,” indicating that employers have a wide gap in needs related to hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities.

When asked their opinion on what services people with disabilities need most to best help them obtain employment, Figure 11 shows the top answers included “trainings on soft skills/interpersonal skills (72%), on-the-job experience (70%), and guidance to help maintain job performance (64%).

FIGURE 11: EMPLOYER SURVEY: IN YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT SERVICES DO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES NEED THAT WOULD BETTER HELP THEM OBTAIN EMPLOYMENT AT YOUR ESTABLISHMENT (PLEASE SELECT TOP 3) (N=50)



Additional comments from employers' included the following:

- *"Employers should understand that employees with disabilities will do well if properly trained at their level, then eventually the applicant will grow into becoming more independent and reliable."*
- *"We welcome applicants with disabilities. We just ask to understand beforehand what are the limitations of the applicant so we know what job we can fit the person based on his/her capabilities."*
- *Do more public outreach and seminars. OVR needs to share success stories of people with disabilities who work in the community."*

Observations from Focus Groups

- Respondents familiar with OVR's noted a visible, concentrated effort to outreach with employers and connect with the business community. They also felt OVR had taken positive steps into expanding social media engagement and reporting. Respondents who were less familiar with OVR felt there needed to be more outreach to the business community and that many businesses were unaware of OVR's services.
- Respondents who had previously committed to partnering for OJT or WET stated they were still waiting for paperwork to be routed to complete the process. At least one respondent noted the amount of time to wait was excessive for standard business practices and that this would deter new businesses from participating in OJT or WET. They indicated the delay in processing might limit employers' recommendations to other employers to participate in the program.

- Respondents noted potential barriers are non-inclusive management practices or unhealthy workplace environments. They indicated that training for upper management positions that focused on inclusive workplace culture, sensitivity training, and emotional intelligence would positively impact individuals with disabilities in the workplace.

Recommendations

- OVR could continue its concentrated outreach efforts to businesses. This includes expanding past conducting presentations to business-related organizations and finding ways to connect specifically with employers that offer careers that interest clients.
- Employers need more support around providing reasonable accommodations. OVR could concentrate its outreach efforts on explaining reasonable accommodation resources and seeking other resources to support employers in providing reasonable accommodations. OVR could also inform businesses of any assistive technology or accommodation support available through grant funding.
- Updating OVR's website to be more user-friendly would help businesses better access resources, such as information regarding financial and tax benefits for hiring individuals with disabilities.
- OVR could create a database of clients' job/career interests. This listing can be shared with potential employers to connect applicants with available job openings in their interested fields more efficiently. The goal would be to match individuals with their interests better and then specifically reach out to employers with those types of job openings.
- To respond to increased interest in partnering with OVR from

employers, OVR counselors should continue to ensure consumers are job-ready through additional training and certifications for clients.

- OVR could identify one point of contact for employers to follow up on cases and opportunities. Having one appointed contact provides clarity for businesses and creates consistent internal communication.
- OVR could conduct training for upper management on how to create positive, inclusive workforce environments. Having appropriately trained managers protects individuals with disabilities and alleviates issues they may face from hostile or unsupportive work environments.
- Businesses shared wanting to see examples of successful rehabilitation situations. Outreach could incorporate more success stories via 1:1 meetings, social media, and external presentations.
- OVR could partner with the Office of Personnel Management, the Department of Finance, and the CNMI Treasury on MOUs to expedite processes for OJT and WET participants. Lengthy procurement wait times were a barrier to the employers/businesses' ability to participate in these programs.
- OVR could partner with the Society of Human Management (SHRM) – NMI Chapter, Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands (HANMI), and the Saipan Chamber of Commerce to conduct job fairs or workshops between HR professionals and OVR clients. HR professionals participating in these organizations are more versed in individuals with disabilities rights and can provide safe places for consumers to seek employment. This increased exposure to employers also addresses a barrier identified by individuals with disabilities: Their fear of the unknown and fear of being fired due to poor performance.

VII. CONCLUSION

Throughout the CSNA, respondents, including clients, employers, disability network partners, and OVR staff, all indicated that OVR made strides in the last few years in supporting individuals with disabilities in their pursuit of vocational rehabilitation. Significant external factors such as Typhoon Yutu and COVID-19 have impacted OVR's operations; however, the OVR staff and the disability network partners have continued to serve the disability community to the best of their abilities. While most clients stated they were satisfied with the level of support they received from OVR, the CSNA used quantitative and qualitative data methods to create recommendations on how to serve the entire CNMI disability population more equitably.

Based on the 2020 CSNA, the CNMI Workforce Development system is not presently addressing all of the needs of individuals with disabilities and the businesses that employ them. OVR and its core partners have the opportunity to address these unmet needs by working together to leverage resources, adjusting programs, and expanding influence. The project team hopes the 2020 CSNA will inform state plans, internal operations, and collaborative efforts to support the CNMI disability community in the pursuit of building their futures.

APPENDIX A: INDIVIDUAL SURVEY



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"Together We Can Build a Future"

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Individual Survey

The CNMI Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is working with Max Impacts: Maxine Laszlo Consulting to conduct an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities who live in CNMI. **The results of this needs assessment will inform the development of the OVR State Plan** for providing rehabilitation services and will **guide decision-making around programs and services for persons with disabilities.**

The following survey includes questions that ask you about the unmet, employment- related needs of persons with disabilities. **We anticipate that it will take about 10 minutes to complete the survey.** If you prefer, you may ask a family member, a personal attendant, or a caregiver to complete the survey for you. If you are a family member, personal attendant or caregiver for a person with a disability and are responding on behalf of an individual with a disability, please answer the survey questions based upon your knowledge of the needs of the person with the disability.

Your participation in this needs assessment is voluntary. **If you decide to participate, your responses will be anonymous** as we do not ask to include your name in the survey. **All information from the surveys is strictly for reporting purposes and will remain confidential.** If you have any questions regarding this survey or if you would prefer to complete this survey in an alternate format, please contact Maxine Laszlo at the following email address cnmiovr2021csna@gmail.com.

Please return the completed survey in the addressed envelope with post-mark date no later than **Monday, February 22nd, 2021.** After you've completed the survey, go to www.tinyurl.com/cnmiovr2021csna for a chance to win a \$25 gift certificate to the restaurant of your choice!

Which statement best describes your association with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)? (select one response)

- I have never used the services of OVR
- I am a current client of OVR
- I am a previous client of OVR, my case has been closed.
- Other (please describe) _____

Employment-Related Needs

The next several questions ask you about your employment-related needs.

Q1	Are you currently employed or self-employed ?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q2	Do you have the education or training to achieve your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q3	Do you have the job skills to achieve your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q4	Do you have the job search skills to achieve your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q5	Do you have the language skills to achieve your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q6	Have you been prevented from achieving your employment goals because there were not enough jobs available ?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q7	Have employers' perceptions of, or attitudes towards, people with disabilities prevented you from achieving your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q8	Has a lack of accommodations prevented you from achieving your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q9	Has a lack of disability-related personal care (such as a personal attendant) prevented you from achieving your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q10	Has a lack of disability-related transportation prevented you from achieving your employment goals (e.g, transportation that includes a wheelchair or scooter lift, hand controls)?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q11	Have other transportation issues , such as not having a reliable means to go to and from work, prevented you from achieving your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q12	Have mental health issues prevented you from achieving your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No

Q13	Have substance abuse issues prevented you from achieving your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q14	Have issues with childcare prevented you from achieving your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q15	Have issues with housing prevented you from achieving your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q16	Have concerns regarding the possible impact of employment on your benefits (such as SSI or SSDI) prevented you from achieving your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No

Q17	Besides mental health and substance abuse issues, have any other health issues prevented you from achieving your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes (please describe) <hr/> <hr/>	<input type="radio"/> No
Q18	Is there anything else that has prevented you from achieving your employment goals?	<input type="radio"/> Yes (please describe) <hr/> <hr/>	<input type="radio"/> No

Q19	What is the most significant barrier to achieving your employment goals? (explain)	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)-Funded Services

The next questions ask you about your experiences with WIOA-funded programs (You may have referred to this program as the WIA program in the past).

Q30	Have you used the services of the WIOA-funded programs?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
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Skip To: Q37 on next page If you answered "No" to Q30.

Q31	Was the WIOA-funded program physically accessible to you?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Q32	Was the WIOA-funded program programmatically accessible to you (Did they have assistive technology that worked)?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No

Q33	<p>What services did you receive from the WIOA-funded programs (select all that apply)?</p> <p> <input type="radio"/> Assessment <input type="radio"/> Training <input type="radio"/> Job placement assistance <input type="radio"/> Employment preparation (resume development, job search assistance) <input type="radio"/> Other (please describe) _____ </p>
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Q34	Did the WIOA-funded program help you find a job?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Not Applicable
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Q35. How helpful were the services that you received from the WIOA-funded programs?				
<input type="radio"/> Very helpful	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="radio"/> Neither helpful nor unhelpful	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat unhelpful	<input type="radio"/> Very unhelpful

Q36	Please write any comments you have about the WIOA-funded program. (Please explain)	<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/>
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Demographic Information

Q37	<p>Please Select Your Gender:</p> <p> <input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Transgender Male <input type="radio"/> Transgender Female </p> <p> <input type="radio"/> Gender Variant/Non-conforming <input type="radio"/> Not listed:_____ <input type="radio"/> Prefer not to answer </p>
Q38	<p>What island do you live on?</p> <p> <input type="radio"/> Saipan <input type="radio"/> Tinian <input type="radio"/> Rota </p>

Q39. What is your race or ethnic group?			
<input type="radio"/> White	<input type="radio"/> Black	<input type="radio"/> American Indian/Alaska Native	<input type="radio"/> Chamorro
<input type="radio"/> Carolinian	<input type="radio"/> Chuukese	<input type="radio"/> Palauan	<input type="radio"/> Yapese
<input type="radio"/> Kosraean	<input type="radio"/> Pohnpeian	<input type="radio"/> Filipino	<input type="radio"/> Vietnamese
<input type="radio"/> Chinese	<input type="radio"/> Japanese	<input type="radio"/> Korean	<input type="radio"/> Hispanic/Latino
<input type="radio"/> Other (please describe) _____			

Q40. Which of the following would you use to describe your primary disabling condition? (select one)			
<input type="radio"/> Blindness	<input type="radio"/> Deaf-blindness	<input type="radio"/> Deafness, I prefer to use auditory communication	<input type="radio"/> Hearing loss, I prefer to use auditory communication
<input type="radio"/> Communication impairment	<input type="radio"/> Cognitive impairment	<input type="radio"/> Deafness, I prefer to use visual communication	<input type="radio"/> Hearing loss, I prefer to use visual communication
<input type="radio"/> Mobility impairment	<input type="radio"/> Psychosocial impairment	<input type="radio"/> Respiratory impairment	<input type="radio"/> Mental Health impairment
<input type="radio"/> Other orthopedic impairments	<input type="radio"/> Other physical impairments	<input type="radio"/> Other visual impairments	<input type="radio"/> No impairment
<input type="radio"/> Other (please describe) _____			

Q41. If you have a secondary disabling condition, which of the following would you use to describe it? (select one) If you do not have a secondary disabling condition, please select "No impairment" below.

<input type="radio"/> Blindness	<input type="radio"/> Deaf-blindness	<input type="radio"/> Deafness, I prefer to use auditory communication	<input type="radio"/> Hearing loss, I prefer to use auditory communication
<input type="radio"/> Communication impairment	<input type="radio"/> Cognitive impairment	<input type="radio"/> Deafness, I prefer to use visual communication	<input type="radio"/> Hearing loss, I prefer to use visual communication
<input type="radio"/> Mobility impairment	<input type="radio"/> Psychosocial impairment	<input type="radio"/> Respiratory impairment	<input type="radio"/> Mental Health impairment
<input type="radio"/> Other orthopedic impairments	<input type="radio"/> Other physical impairments	<input type="radio"/> Other visual impairments	<input type="radio"/> No impairment
<input type="radio"/> Other (please describe) _____			

Q42. If you have a third disabling condition, which of the following would you use to describe it? (select one) If you do not have a third disabling condition, please select "No impairment" below.

<input type="radio"/> Blindness	<input type="radio"/> Deaf-blindness	<input type="radio"/> Deafness, I prefer to use auditory communication	<input type="radio"/> Hearing loss, I prefer to use auditory communication
<input type="radio"/> Communication impairment	<input type="radio"/> Cognitive impairment	<input type="radio"/> Deafness, I prefer to use visual communication	<input type="radio"/> Hearing loss, I prefer to use visual communication
<input type="radio"/> Mobility impairment	<input type="radio"/> Psychosocial impairment	<input type="radio"/> Respiratory impairment	<input type="radio"/> Mental Health impairment
<input type="radio"/> Other orthopedic impairments	<input type="radio"/> Other physical impairments	<input type="radio"/> Other visual impairments	<input type="radio"/> No impairment
<input type="radio"/> Other (please describe) _____			

Q43	Is there anything else you would like to add about OVR or its services?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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This is the end of the survey; OVR appreciates your input!
 After completing the survey, please mail it back to OVR and go to www.tinyurl.com/cnmiovr2021csna for a chance to win!

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS

Focus Group Protocol – CNMI OVR staff:

Introductions

- **Review consent form.**
- **Please share your title and your primary functions within the OVR Office?**

Employment Goals

- What barriers do people with disabilities in CNMI face in getting or keeping a job? Follow up: Education, not enough jobs, discrimination, attitudes, lack of communications, fear of loss of benefits, lack of knowledge of options, etc.

Barriers to accessing services

- What barriers do people with disabilities encounter when trying to access rehabilitation services from OVR?

Impressions of needs of individuals with significant and most significant disabilities

- What are the unmet rehabilitation needs of individuals with significant or most significant disabilities?
- What needs of individuals with significant and most significant disabilities are being met the best/most extensively?

Needs of underserved groups with disabilities

- What groups of individuals would you consider un-served or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation system?
(Prompt for different disability groups, minority status, geographic area or any other characteristics).
(For each identified group): What unmet needs do they have?

Need for supported employment

- Please describe how effective the SE is in CNMI. What populations are receiving SE and CE services?
- What SE or CE needs are not being met?
- What do you recommend to meet the needs for SE or CE?

Need for self-employment

- Please describe how effective the self-employment is in CNMI. What populations are receiving self employment services?
- What self employment needs are not being met?
- What do you recommend to meet the needs for self employment?

Transition

- What needs do young people with disabilities in transition from high school have as far as preparing for, obtaining or retaining employment?

- How well is OVR serving youth in transition in terms of preparing them for postsecondary education or employment?
- What can OVR do to improve services to youth in transition?

Needs of individuals served through the WIOA program

- How effectively does the WIOA program in CNMI serve individuals with disabilities?
- Are there any barriers to individuals with disabilities accessing services through the WIOA program? If so, what are they and what can be done to change this?
- How effectively is OVR working in partnership with the WIOA program? Do you have any recommendations about how to improve this partnership if needed?
- What would you recommend to improve the WIOA program's ability to serve individuals with disabilities in CNMI?

Need for establishment, development or improvement of CRPs

- What community-based rehabilitation programs or services need to be created, expanded or improved?
- What services need to be offered in new locations in order to meet people's needs?
- What community-based rehabilitation services are most successful? How are they most successful or what makes them so?

Need for improvement of services or outcomes

- What needs to be done to improve the vocational rehabilitation services that people receive?

COVID-19

- Please describe how COVID-19 has impacted people with disabilities receiving services from OVR?
- What needs are not being met due to COVID-19?
- What do you recommend to meet the needs?

Focus Group Protocol - Partner Agencies:

Introduction

- Review the consent form

Employment Goals

- What barriers do people with disabilities in CNMI face in getting or keeping a job?
 - Follow up: Education, not enough jobs, discrimination, attitudes, lack of communications, fear of loss of benefits, lack of knowledge of options, etc.

Impressions of needs of individuals with significant and most significant disabilities

- What are the unmet rehabilitation needs of individuals with significant or most significant disabilities?
- What needs of individuals with significant and most significant disabilities are being met the best/most extensively?

Needs of underserved groups with disabilities

- What groups of individuals would you consider un-served or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation system?
 - (Prompt for different disability groups, minority status, geographic area or other characteristics)
 - (For each identified group): What unmet needs do they have?

Need for supported employment

- Please describe how effective the SE is in CNMI. What populations are receiving SE services?
- What SE needs are not being met?
- What do you recommend to meet the needs for SE?

Transition

- What needs do young people with disabilities in transition from high school have as far as preparing for, obtaining or retaining employment?
- How well are the high schools in CNMI preparing young people for the world of postsecondary education or employment? What can the schools do differently to prepare young people to be successful in postsecondary education or employment?
- How would you characterize OVR's relationship/partnership with the secondary school system in CNMI?
- How well is OVR serving youth in transition in terms of preparing them for postsecondary education or employment?
- What can OVR do to improve services to youth in transition?

Needs of individuals served through the CNMI WIOA program or WIOA system

- How effectively does the Workforce Center system in CNMI serve individuals with disabilities?
- Are there any barriers to individuals with disabilities accessing services through WIOA program? If so, what are they and what can be done to change this?
- How effectively is OVR working in partnership with the WIOA program? Do you have any recommendations about how to improve this partnership if needed?
- What would you recommend to improve the Workforce Center's ability to serve individuals with disabilities in CNMI?

Need for establishment, development or improvement of CRPs

- What community-based rehabilitation programs or services need to be created, expanded or improved?
- What services need to be offered in new locations in order to meet people's needs?
- What community-based rehabilitation services are most successful? How are they most successful or what makes them so?

Need for improvement of services or outcomes

Focus Group Protocol - Individuals with Disabilities:

Introductions

- **Review Consent Form**

Employment goals

- What barriers do people with disabilities in CNMI face in getting or keeping a job?
 - Follow up: Transportation, education, not enough jobs, discrimination, attitudes, lack of communications, fear of loss of benefits, lack of knowledge of options, etc.

OVR Overall Performance

- What has your experience with OVR been like? What have been the positives and negatives?
- What services were helpful to you in preparing for, obtaining and retaining employment?
- What services did you need that were not available or provided and why weren't you able to get these services?
- What can OVR do differently to help consumers get and keep good jobs?

Barriers to accessing services

- What barriers do people with disabilities encounter when trying to access rehabilitation services from OVR? (prompts if necessary -- mobility, communication, structural)

CNMI Workforce Partners

- Has anyone had used or tried to use the services of The CNMI WIOA program?
 - Follow-up: What was that experience like for you? What can they do differently to better serve individuals with disabilities?

Transition

- What needs do young people with disabilities in transition from high school have as far as preparing for, obtaining or retaining employment?
- How well are the high schools in CNMI preparing young people for the world of postsecondary education or employment? What can the schools do differently to prepare young people to be successful in postsecondary education or employment?
- What can OVR do to improve services to youth in transition?

Needs of underserved groups with disabilities

- What groups of individuals would you consider un-served or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation system?
 - (For each identified group): What unmet needs do they have?

Need for establishment of CRPs

- Have you received services from a CRP? If so, how was your service? How effective was it? What can be done to improve the future service delivery by CRPs?
- What programs or services should be created that focus on enhancing the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families, meeting basic needs and ensuring inclusion and participation? Of these services now in existence, which need to be improved?
- What services need to be offered in new locations in order to meet people's needs?

Need for improvement of services or outcomes

- What needs to be done to improve the vocational rehabilitation services that people receive in CNMI?

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