



A COMMON MISSION. A WEALTH OF POSSIBILITIES.

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Commonwealth Corporation and Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Release Data Linking Working Age Population with Disabilities to Poverty

BOSTON – Three new reports issued today by the Commonwealth Corporation and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission link the working-age population in Massachusetts with disabilities and poverty. The reports examine the demographics of this particular population as well as their employment and poverty status.

Report data finds a high degree of overlap between the population with disabilities of our state and the poor / near poor population, with the highest degree of overlap in older adults (55 and older). Strengthening the employability and earnings of the adult population with disabilities would have positive fiscal impacts on state and national government budgets.

“We must continue to build public and private sector partnerships with the disability community to help expand employment opportunities,” said Jane C. Edmonds, Director of the Massachusetts Department of Workforce Development. “These reports make a clear case for doing more to increase access to training and education that will move more people with disabilities into gainful employment.”

“This data clearly shows that too many people with disabilities in Massachusetts are falling behind,” stated Bartels. “The next step is for people with disabilities to make use of job training and placement resources, and to break down the barriers people face in getting into the workforce, and this will require additional support and resources from the community.”

Report Highlights Include:

- During 2003 and 2004, on average, 509,000 individuals ages 16–74 in Massachusetts reported one or more physical or mental disabilities, representing 11.3% of the state’s resident population in this age group.
- Disability rates were lowest among younger adults (20–34 years old), and then they rose steadily with age. They were being highest among those 65 to 74 years old.
- Disability rates varied widely across race-ethnic groups in the state. They were highest among Hispanic (17%) and Black adults (13%) and lowest among Asians (7%).
- Unemployment rates among adults with disabilities in 2003–2004 was nearly 16% versus 6% among the non-disabled.
- Only 30% of adults with disabilities in Massachusetts were employed during 2003–2004, a rate well below that of their non-disabled counterparts (74%).

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- Adults with disabilities in Massachusetts were nearly three times as likely as their non-disabled peers to be poor or near poor in recent years.
- There is a high degree of overlap between the population with disabilities of our state and the poor / near poor population, with the degree of overlap being highest for older adults (55 and older).

Andrew Sum, Director, Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies, kicked off the forum which included a lively panel discussion. Panelists included: Elmer Bartels, Commissioner, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission; Jane C. Edmonds, Director, Massachusetts Department of Workforce Development; Bob Foley, University Programs Manager, Eastern Region, Raytheon; Timothy Murphy, Secretary, Massachusetts Executive Office, Health and Human Services; and Representative Michael Rodrigues, Chairman of the House Committee on Labor and Workforce Development.

About Commonwealth Corporation

Commonwealth Corporation is a quasi-public agency with a 25-year history in education and workforce development in Massachusetts. Our 70 person staff develops education and workforce development programs that increase the prosperity of vulnerable youth and adults while making businesses more competitive. Our unique approach brings together research and evaluation, program model development, and sharing our learning through the education, workforce development, and policy communities. Commonwealth Corporation receives financial support from the Massachusetts Department of Workforce Development.

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