



DEED, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and State Services for the Blind Strategic Overview

August 3, 2021

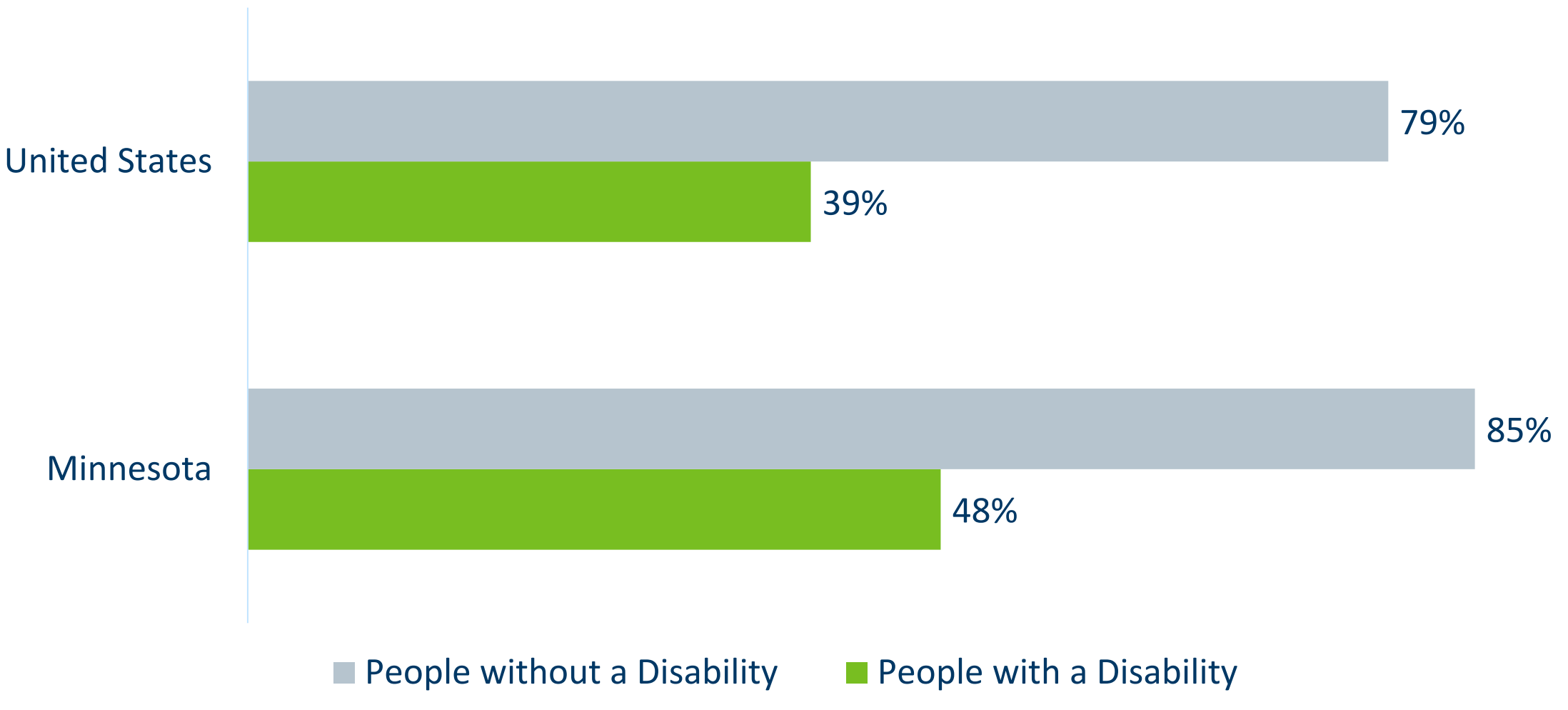
DEED Commissioner Steve Grove

SSB Director Natasha Jerde | VRS Director Dee Torgerson

Agenda

- **Kickoff:** Kim Babine, VRS Director of Community Partnerships
- **Welcome and Commissioner Updates:** Commissioner Grove
- **CareerForce Updates:** Dee Torgerson, VRS Director
- **SSB Updates:** Natasha Jerde, SSB Director
- **VRS Updates:** Dee Torgerson, VRS Director
 - Chris McVey: VRS Director of Strategic Initiatives, Kim Babine: VRS Director of Community Partnerships, Amanda Jensen-Stahl: VRS Manager of Interagency Partnerships and Business Engagement
- **Q&A:** Moderated by Kim Babine, VRS Director of Community Partnerships
- **Closing Remarks:** Dee Torgerson, VRS Director and Natasha Jerde, SSB Director

Employment Rates Among Minnesotans with Disabilities



What We've Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Many of our services can be delivered remotely
- Service delivery often improves when delivered remotely because it removes physical barriers
- We can run a much more efficient system than we currently operate
- In-person services still matter, especially to bridge the digital divide
- Digital transformation means delivering the right service to the right person
- We work in a networked space – partnerships are key to success

Our Evolving Service Model – Core Principles

- **Equity:** Center everything we do around equity
- **Proactivity:** Take a proactive stance – meet people where they are
- **Flexibility:** Embrace the opportunity to try new things and learn as we go

DEED-VRS and DEED-SSB Meets Business Needs

- Shares vital information on in demand careers with students and adults with disabilities
- Connects Minnesota business to an untapped talent pool
- Partners with business to provide disability related information, resources and training

CareerForce Updates

The Job Service Customer

- CareerForce serves everyone:
 - Re-opening to the public and by appointment August 2, 2021.
 - We must provide equal access for employment services to everyone inside and outside of the CareerForce system.
 - We will do this through a mixture of in-person, remote, and online self-services across the state.
- The customers we'll proactively focus on are:
 - People with barriers to employment: BIPOC, veterans, those with no access to technology.
 - People receiving UI and MFIP services.

SSB Updates

SSB: A Hybrid Approach

- Philosophy and approach remains the same: “We go to you”
- Hybrid service model based on customer needs and informed choice
 - In home
 - In the community
 - Virtual
- Decreased physical footprint in CareerForce locations, increased presence in the community
- No waiting list for services!

SSB: Resumption of Services Timeline

- April 2021: SSU resumed 1 person per day in-person services;
- May 2021: WDU employment specialists, assistive technologists, and rehabilitation teacher resumed 1 person per day in-person services
- July 2021: No limits to in-person services
- August 2021: Return of Communication Center volunteers
- August 2021: Doors open to the public by appointment only

SSB: Current Trends

- Applications exceeding pre-COVID numbers
- Successful closures in competitive integrated employment trending upwards but can be better
- A virtual world forced everyone to look at long-term accessibility of systems and documents, thus increasing opportunities and access for blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind Minnesotans
- Transportation barriers both increased and decreased
 - Public transportation options/schedules have been significantly reduced
 - But remote work is becoming standard

SSB: Priorities and Future Vision

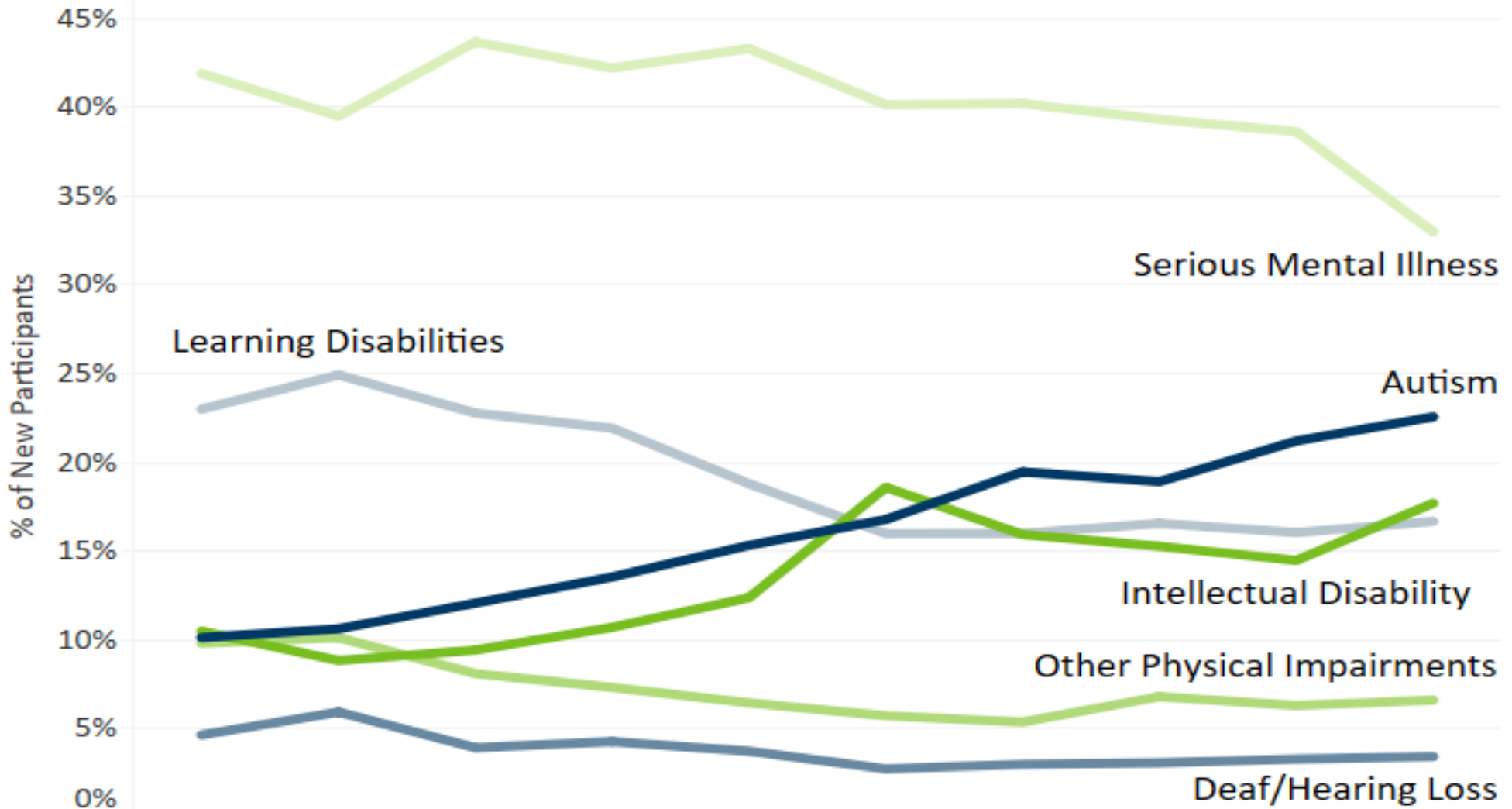
- Hybrid service delivery approach based on individual needs and informed choice
- Spending challenges mean opportunities for initiatives that improve services to customers, especially around Pre-ETS
- Long-term recruitment and retention of diverse and skilled staff
- Community Partner collaboration around service delivery
- Increased and intentional outreach to underserved communities
- A focus on mental health
- Ramping up Aging Eyes Initiative within Senior Services to reach more seniors than ever before

VRS Updates

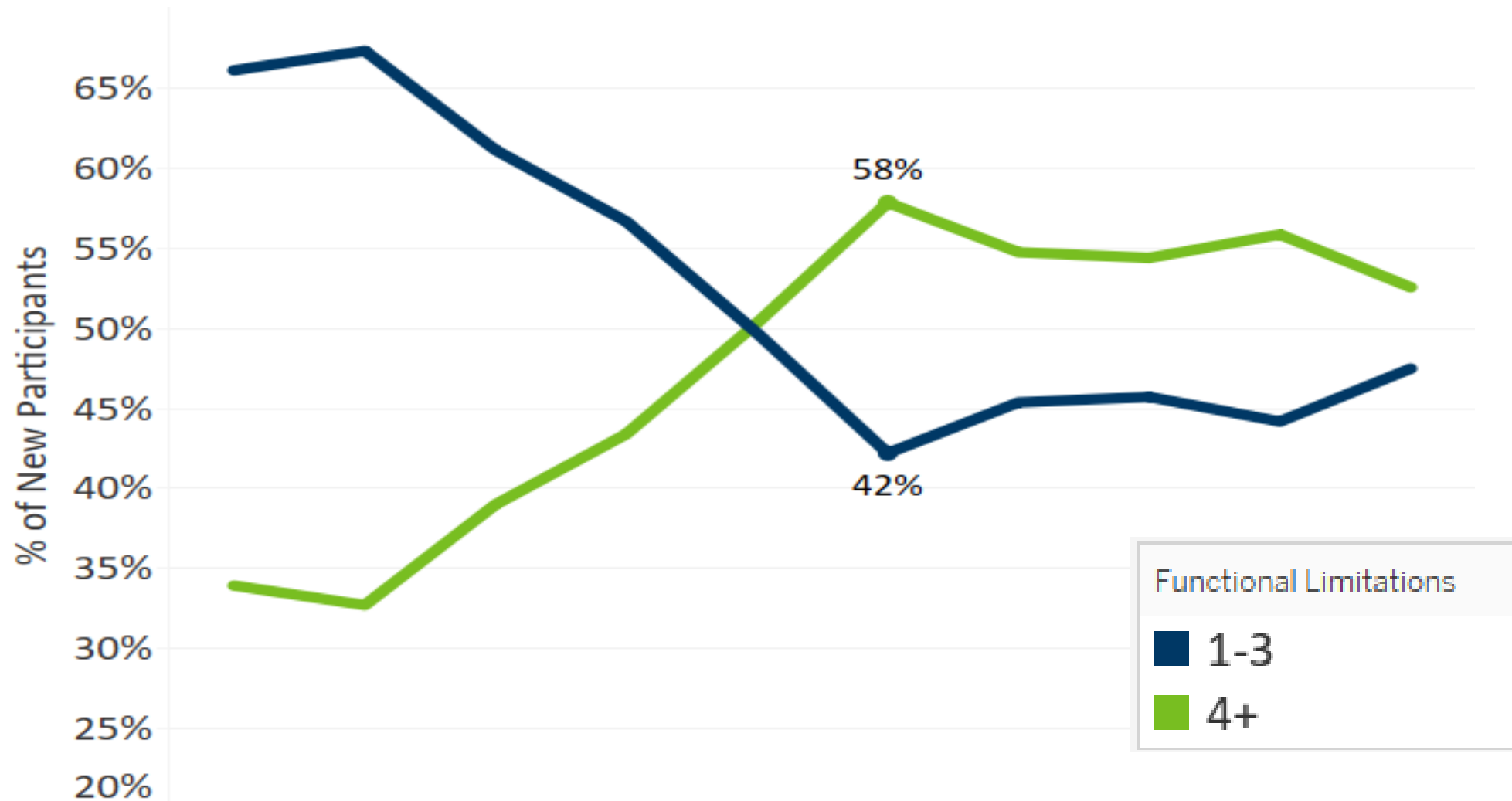
Changing Landscape: Serving Individuals with More Significantly Impacting Disabilities

- 2013-2020 Waiting List
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act
 - Section 511
 - Pre-ETS 15% federal funding spending requirement serving students
 - E1MN MOU (Collaboration with MN Department of Human Services)

The Changing Landscape of VRS – Disability Types



The Changing Landscape of VRS – Complexity



Changing Landscape: Serving More Students

Services to students are growing:

- Nearly 60% of VRS participants were youth at the time they started VRS services; almost 3,000 (22%) are current high school students.
- In addition, we make services available through schools to another 50,000 students with disabilities through pre-employment transition services, more commonly referred to as Pre-ETS.

Changing Landscape: VRS is Ready

- Categories 1, 2, & 3 opened in 2020 – VRS is ready to serve people with one or more functional limitations at this time
- VRS supports people with wide variety of disabilities reach their career goals
- Benefits Planning is key to making fully informed decisions
- VRS supports people with disabilities plan for careers earning family sustaining wages

VRS Transitioning to a New Model of Services

VRS Mission:

Empower youth and adults with disabilities to achieve their goals for competitive, integrated employment.

- Increased choice for our participants
- Person Centered Services
- Eliminate barriers to services
- Increase outreach and engagement to underserved populations
- Increase collaboration with agencies and partners (E1MN)
- Increase access and flexibility for parents and families
- Keep categories of services open

VRS Person-Centered Services

VRS envisions a future for Minnesotans with disabilities where:

- There is **freedom for meaningful choice and self-determination through a planning process directed by the individual** and opportunities for economic self-sufficiency in competitive, integrated employment
- Person-centered approaches are best practices and employment opportunities are identified and **developed beyond the choices available today**.
- VRS, the business community, Community Rehabilitation Programs, educators, employers, other agencies and representatives:
 - engage with one another as trusted workforce development partners that **break down barriers to employment and independent living**, and
 - **are leaders, successful learners, take risks with new ideas, share knowledge, engage, think critically and adopt change**

Focus on equity, Accessibility, and Person-Centered Services

VRS will offer expanded services options for individuals with disabilities. We want to meet people where they are. The expanded service options include:

- Colleges, Universities and Technical Colleges
- High Schools – VRS is present in over 400 school districts across the state
- County Offices
- Remote or Virtual Services – VRS's new WF1 app will be launched Fall 2021. The new app will support greater remote connection and communication.
- VRS, CareerForce MN, or partner offices, as well as other community locations in which the individual feels comfortable
- The potential or current participant's home

DEED Digital Services – where we're headed

- **Replacing Minnesotaworks.net** with a modern, accessible, mobile-friendly labor exchange and account management platform
- **Reviewing customer-facing content** to make sure information is accessible, updated, accurate, and easy to find
- **Exploring new tools and platforms** to provide better direct services
- **Launching Workforce One Connect app** to help participants communicate with counselors, submit documents, and get information about local resources

DEED - Our approach to physical space

- We are choosing a space footprint that fits our service delivery models
- Our footprint will be a combination of leased space in CareerForce and other partner locations, use of third-party spaces, and mobile services
- Shifting of costs from physical space to direct services
- Physical space reduction is a national trend for VR
- We need your support

VRS: Resumption of Services Timeline

- Safety Protocols for Staff and Individuals Served in Place
- June 2021: Phased In-Person Services Began
- August 2, 2021: In-Person Services Available at VRS onsite and offsite by appointment only
- Continue virtual or remote services if preferred by the individual served

VRS – Partnering with Business

- Employer visits, tours, and meetings to understand an employer's specific hiring needs and better connect VRS's talented pool of job seekers to jobs.
- Assist employers with their recruitment needs by reaching out to our wide network of job seekers and coordinating with our partners to meet hiring needs.
- Provide no cost training and consultation on important topics such as creating disability inclusive work environments, understanding who is covered/protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and recognizing an accommodation request and implementing reasonable accommodations.

What this means for you

- Individuals and their Families
- VRS Community Partners and Potential Community Partners
- Advocacy Organizations and Advocates

Discussion

Q & A: We want to hear from you

Please Submit Questions Using this Form: <https://forms.office.com/g/KiVJK6ZuPD>

- Which changes are you most excited about?
- What challenges do you anticipate?
- How can VRS/SSB collaborate more intently with you on reaching individuals needing services?
- What additional VRS/SSB changes would you recommend to best serve the persons that you represent?
- What other ideas do you have for VRS/SSB to best meet the needs of employers seeking qualified job candidates?

In Conclusion

- NO wait list! Categories are open.
- Utilize new learning and digital technologies
- Increased availability and more opportunities to connect
- Dedicated to sustaining strong partnerships
- Stronger business partnerships
- Decreasing physical footprint in order to
 - divert funds into direct services for individuals with disabilities
 - keep categories of services OPEN long term

Contact for more information

SSB

- mn.gov/deed/ssb
- Main Line: 651-539-2300
- Director Natasha Jerde
 - Natasha.Jerde@state.mn.us
 - 651-539-2272

VRS

- mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities
- Dee Torgerson, VRS Director:
Dee.Torgerson@state.mn.us
- Chris McVey, VRS Director of Strategic Initiatives:
Chris.McVey@state.mn.us
- Kim Babine, VRS Director of Community Partnerships: Kim.Babine@state.mn.us
- Amanda Jensen-Stahl, VRS Manager of Interagency Partnerships and Business Engagement: Amanda.Jensen-Stahl@state.mn.us
- To be added to the email list for general VRS information: contact Karla.Eckhoff@state.mn.us

Thank You!