

REVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PROGRAMS PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Highlights

- The objectives of this systematic review are to determine the quality of existing causal evidence regarding the effectiveness of interventions intended to improve labor market outcomes for people with disabilities and to describe lessons learned from the implementation of such programs.
- This topic area currently includes research with causal analyses and implementation studies associated with causal impact studies (See Appendix A). Select descriptive studies may be included.

Introduction and Scope of Review

The review focuses on the effectiveness of interventions designed to improve labor market outcomes of job seekers and workers with disabilities. Compared to those without disabilities, people with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed, to receive lower wages when employed, to have lower levels of education and work experience, and to require income and other governmental support.¹ Federal government expenditures to support the working-age population with disabilities in fiscal year 2014 reached \$498 billion.²

The review focuses on the following research questions:

- What is the quality of existing causal evidence on the effectiveness of interventions, programs, and policies designed to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities?
- What is the quality of existing causal evidence on the effectiveness of interventions, programs, and policies designed to improve earnings outcomes for individuals with disabilities?
- What is the quality of existing causal evidence on the effectiveness of interventions, programs, and policies designed to increase credential attainment among individuals with disabilities?

Because health status is an important factor in determining the extent to which a person with a disability can work and because employment can have a positive association with health, the review also addressed this secondary research question:

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022). Persons with a disability: labor force characteristics summary. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm>.

² Livermore, G., Shenk, M., & Stapleton, D. (2019). Federal and state expenditures for working-age people with disabilities in Fiscal Year 2014. *Journal of Disability Studies*, 30, 111-117.

- What is the quality of existing causal evidence on the effectiveness of programs designed to improve the health status of, and therefore potentially the labor market outcomes of, people with disabilities?

To assess the evidence along these research questions, the review examines outcomes in the following domains:

- **Employment**, including but not limited to measures such as employment rate, tenure on the job, and consecutive months employed, and time to return to work following illness or injury.
- **Earnings and wages**, including but not limited to monthly, quarterly, or annual wages, hourly wages, and cumulative wages over the follow-up period.
- **Education and/or training attainment and completion**, including, but not limited to earning a high school diploma, General Educational Development certificate (GED), or other high school equivalency credential; earning vocational certificates or post-secondary degrees; or completing a training program that does not necessarily result in a certificate.
- **Public benefits receipt**, including but not limited to disability benefit receipt, unemployment compensation, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits, and Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance.
- **Health**, including any measures of health status, such as general health status, unmet health needs status, functional limitation status, and ability to perform activities of daily living.

Eligibility Criteria

CLEAR conducts a broad literature search to identify research papers and reports that examine at least one of the research questions of interest. The identified causal research is examined against the eligibility criteria described below, and studies meeting these criteria receive a second-level review, including an assessment of the quality of the causal evidence presented in the study. Implementation studies that are associated with an impact study that has received a high or moderate causal evidence rating may be included if meeting the criteria listed below.³

1. **Does it examine a program designed to improve labor market outcomes?** To be eligible for review, the research must examine a program or intervention designed to improve the labor market outcomes of people with disabilities. The program may target all people with disabilities or specific subpopulations. Programs can include incentives and services such as pre-employment services, career assessments, employment skills and career pathways training, job coaching, employer-provided accommodations, medical management, group or individual counseling, income support incentives, tax incentives, benefit and employment counseling, health

³ The update of this topic area in 2022 includes only those implementation studies associated with a causal study included in CLEAR and with an evidence rating of high or moderate.

insurance, medication management, and other customized supports.

2. **Does it examine the effectiveness of an intervention using quantitative methods?** To meet this criterion, the research must use quantitative methods to assess the effectiveness of a program or intervention. This includes research that claims to identify a causal impact even if the study design did not support such claims.
3. **Does it examine the population of interest?** Research must focus on working-age adults aged 16 to 64 or transition age youth aged 14 to 24 with one or more disabilities as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. These age ranges and definitions of disability are consistent with those used by Social Security Administration (SSA), other federal disability programs and employment initiatives, and federal disability nondiscrimination laws.
4. **Was it conducted in a relevant time and place?** To be relevant to current practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders, the research must have taken place in the United States, the District of Columbia, territories, and tribal entities on or after January 1, 1991.
5. **Is it published in English?** All research studies must be published in English to be considered for inclusion in CLEAR. Review Process and Causal Evidence Guidelines Specific to this Topic Area.

CLEAR employs a standardized, systematic review process as documented in the *CLEAR Policies and Procedures*.⁴ This evidence review includes both experimental and nonexperimental causal research which are reviewed and rated based on the eligibility criteria previously described and the *CLEAR Causal Evidence Guidelines*.⁵ In assessing the quality of the evidence, CLEAR uses ratings of high, moderate, and low. Only two types of studies may receive a high rating: well-conducted randomized controlled trials (RCTs) with low attrition and no obvious confounds to the RCT design and interrupted time series (ITS) designs with sufficient replication. The *CLEAR Causal Evidence Guidelines* describe the criteria for rating the quality of evidence. In addition, Table 1 provides the additional guidance specific to this review. Implementation studies included in this review are assessed using the *CLEAR Guidelines for Reviewing Implementation Studies* and do not receive a causal rating.⁶

⁴ *CLEAR Policies and Procedures* may be found at <https://clear.dol.gov/>.

⁵ The *CLEAR Causal Evidence Review Guidelines* may be found <https://clear.dol.gov/>.

⁶ The *CLEAR Guidelines for Reviewing Implementation Studies* may be found at <https://clear.dol.gov/>.

Table 1: Employment for People with Disabilities Evidence Review Specific Guidance

	CLEAR Causal Evidence Guidelines	Topic Area Specific Guidance
Attrition Standard	Study must have low attrition at the cluster or subcluster level to meet Criterion RCT.2.	Use conservative attrition standard.
Control Variables	To meet Criterion Regression.1 and receive a moderate rating, nonexperimental causal research must include specific control variables in its regression analysis (other than those using fixed effects). Regression methods that incorporate a matching design must match on these control variables; if not, they must include them as controls in the regression.	To meet the requirements for a moderate causal evidence rating, nonexperimental studies and RCTs with high attrition in this topic area must include statistical controls participant characteristics and a pre-intervention measure of each outcome of interest. For further information about how the evidence review was conducted, please contact DOL's Chief Evaluation Office at chiefevaluationoffice@dol.gov.
Changes in Group Composition	Studies with nonexperimental designs and analyses at the group level must meet Criterion Regression.4 to receive a moderate causal evidence rating.	Use conservative migration standard.
Pre-intervention Data	An ITS design must use data drawn from a sufficiently long period of time before an intervention's implementation to meet Criterion ITS.2.	Data must cover at least one year before the implementation of the intervention.

⁷ The principal investigator may determine when certain control variables are appropriate. For example, studies examining youth employment would not be required to control for pre-intervention employment as few youth may have been previously employed.

APPENDIX A

CLEAR conducts a comprehensive literature search to identify research meeting the eligibility criteria described in the review protocol. This process includes (1) a database search, (2) a search of selected internet sites for grey literature, and (3) a Google Scholar search for specific intervention names.

1. Database Search

All CLEAR searches use the following databases to identify causal literature: Scopus, Academic Search Ultimate, Business Source Corporate Plus, E-Journals, EconLit with Full Text, Education Research Complete, ERIC, Sociology Source Ultimate, APA PsycINFO, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. In conducting the search, CLEAR uses “and” to connect terms from each category (design, outcome, impact, and keyword terms) and “or” among terms within a category. An asterisk indicates a truncation. When used in a search term, all words with the root are returned. For example, a search on “occupation*” returns citations with the words that have “occupation” as the first ten letters, including “occupation,” “occupations,” and “occupational.”

Table A.1 Keywords used in database searches for the Disability Employment Topic Area

Subject terms	“Mental disorder*”, “physical disorder*”
Design terms	Causal, evaluation*, experiment*, random*, regression, quantitative, quasi*, statistical
Outcome terms	employ*, job, work*, occupation*, promot*, earn*, wage, salary, pay, income, certificat*, degree completion, career, credential, “disability benefit”
Impact terms	Effect*, impact*
Keyword terms	Disabil*, “disability insurance”, “supplemental security income”, “neurodiv*”, accommodation AND “accelerated benefit”, “benefit w/3 counseling”, employment w/3 service*”, “employment w/3 support*”, “employment w/3 training”, “employment w/3 transition”, “income support”, “job w/3 training”, “labor market outcome*”, “supported employment” “tax w/3 incentive*”, “vocational rehabilitation”, “work w/3 incentive*”, “work w/3 training”, “workplace w/3 support*”, “Employment First”, “sheltered workshop”, “sub-minimum wage”, “Customized Employment”, “Pre- Employment Transition Services”, “Natural Support”, “Project SEARCH”, “competitive integrated employment”, “assistive technology”, “individual placement and support”, “Post-Assistance Self-Sufficiency”, “Disability Program Navigator”, “Ticket to Work”, “Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment” “return to work”

2. Internet Sites Grey Literature Search

CLEAR also searches the websites of organizations conducting research in this topic area using a limited set of keywords. This search identifies studies that may not be published elsewhere, such as technical reports from government agencies or working papers, and studies not available through the database search. The study team uses a Custom Google Search engine with an abbreviated set of keywords to review the following sites.

- Abt Associates
- American Institutes for Research (AIR)
- ASR Analytics
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Labor
- DIR
- ICF
- Kessler Foundation
- Lewin
- Mathematica
- MDRC
- Navigant
- NORC at the University of Chicago
- RAND Corporation
- RTI International
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- Social Security Administration
- Social Solutions
- Urban Institute
- Vanderbilt University
- Virginia Commonwealth University
- Westat

The search strategy for these websites uses a search string of “disability” AND (“employ* OR job OR work* OR earn* OR wage OR certificat*”) AND causal AND (impact OR effect) with a set date range of January 2014 through October 2022. CLEAR limits to studies published in English.

3. Google Scholar Search

CLEAR conducted a Google Scholar search using a specific list of intervention/program names listed below combined with “disability” and “impact” to connect the terms. The search was limited

to publications between January 2014 and October 2022 and limited to studies published in English.

- Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment
- Competitive integrated employment
- Customized Employment
- Customized integrated employment
- Employment First
- Individual Placement and Support
- Pre-Employment Transition Services
- Project SEARCH
- Stay-at-work/return-to-work
- Supported Employment
- Ticket to Work