



Research Article:

State-Level Analysis of Subminimum Wage Use for Individuals with Disabilities in the United States: Implications for Policy and Practice

The following research summary is for general information and reference purposes for vocational rehabilitation counselors.

A Quick Look:

There has been a lot of discussion nationwide about the need to increase the federal minimum wage to a *living wage*. While a number of states and districts have increased their wage rates to exceed the federal minimum, individuals with disabilities are still legally able to be paid subminimum wages through use of a 14c certificate program. A report from the U.S. Commission on Civil rights concluded that workers with disabilities being paid subminimum wages do not have profiles that are significantly different than other workers with disabilities who earn competitive wages in integrated community jobs. Some states, districts and U.S. territories have begun to eliminate subminimum wage practices. However, many states continue to pay wages that are below the federal minimum to individuals with disabilities. This article examined the prevalence of 14c certificate use across the United States.

Key Findings:

As of April (2022), data from the U.S. Department of Labor indicated the following:

- There are at least 1,162 14c certificate holding agencies across the country paying workers with disabilities subminimum wages.
- At least 37,673 workers with disabilities identified in the U.S. Department of Labor database are paid subminimum wages. However, the actual number is higher because the reported data only accounts for issued certificates and does not include workers on pending certificates.
- Most 14c applications are renewals rather than initial applications.
- Prevalence use is highest in the Midwest region of the United States.
- Only 9 states/districts have completely ceased use of 14c certificates including Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Alaska, Maryland, Delaware, Vermont, Hawaii, and the District of Columbia

Putting It into Practice

The practice of paying individuals with disabilities subminimum wages continues across the United States. Findings indicate that while change is occurring, progress toward reducing and eliminating these practices is slow. Research has identified a number of evidenced-based practices that are effective in helping individuals with even the most significant disabilities secure and maintain competitive integrated employment. These interventions include supported and customized employment. Moving forward, it is important for policy and

practice to ensure that evidenced-based interventions leading to competitive integrated employment are provided to individuals with disabilities. It is also important to make sure those providing employment services are trained in practices that lead to competitive integrated employment outcomes.

Article Citation:

Avellone, L., Taylor, J., Wehman, P., Inge, K., & Brooke, V. (2023). State-Level Analysis of Subminimum Wage Use for Individuals with Disabilities in the United States: Implications for Policy and Practice. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 48(3), 127-138.

**The contents of this resources were developed under a grant number H421D220009 from the Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.
(Authority: 20 U.S.C. §§ 1221e-3 and 3474)**