

CASELOAD TRENDS THROUGH FISCAL YEAR 1992

I - SUMMARY

Caseload trends in the State-Federal Program of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) in FY 1992 exhibited a mixture of gains and losses. Foremost among the losses was the number of persons successfully rehabilitated which fell below 200,000 for the first time in 25 years. The number of rehabilitations of persons with severe disabilities declined to an eight-year low.

The rehabilitation, or "success", rate among cases closed after acceptance for services was another notable declining trend, this time to the lowest level in 45 years. Fewer than six persons in ten could be rehabilitated. The rehabilitation rate for persons with severe disabilities fell to its lowest level ever.

The rate at which applicants were determined eligible for rehabilitation services--the acceptance rate--fell to a 10-year low. The acceptance rate is now below 57 percent.

State VR agencies provided services to increased numbers of persons with disabilities for the fifth year in a row and saw their total workload of applicants and clients expand for the eighth consecutive year. More than 1,500,000 persons interacted in some way with State VR agencies in FY 1992.

Despite the decrease in rehabilitations and the rehabilitation rate noted above for persons with severe disabilities, there were several caseload gains for this group. Those served, for example, increased for the seventh time in as many years to the highest number ever. Those accepted to receive VR services came close to a quarter of a million for the first time. Also, persons with severe disabilities accounted for about seventy percent of all persons in State agency caseloads, another record high.

Interestingly, the number of cases at all stages of the rehabilitation process on the last day of the fiscal year (September 30, 1992) exceeded 900,000 for the first time in ten years. This end-of-year increase is largely a function of decreases in cases closed from the rehabilitation process, especially decreases in the number of persons rehabilitated.

Key caseload highlights are described more fully in the paragraphs below containing references to the 13 historical tables and six charts which follow this textual summary. All figures cited are a National summary of caseloads in the State-Federal Program. As such, they represent the net effects of differing trends in the various State VR agencies in operation in FY 1992.

II. REHABILITATIONS

All Persons Rehabilitated (Tables 1 and 2, Figure A)

State agencies rehabilitated 191,890 persons in FY 1992, a 5.4 percent decrease from the number rehabilitated in FY 1991 (202,831). This marked the sixth year in the last seven of a declining trend and represented the fewest number of persons rehabilitated since FY 1967, when rehabilitations were last under 200,000. In the same span of time, in contrast, the number of persons who could not be rehabilitated has increased in six of the last seven years, reaching a ten-year high.

The FY 1992 decline in rehabilitations continues the long-term downward trend beginning in the mid-1970's which has seen the number of rehabilitations fall in 11 of the last 15 years. The greatest part of this decline has been in numbers of persons who did not have severe disabilities.

The decrease in rehabilitations from FY 1991 was about 11,000 persons which, in turn, was 13,300 less than in FY 1990. Most of this decrease is explained by a decline in the rehabilitation rate, discussed more fully in the paragraph below, showing that relatively fewer of the case closures were deemed to have been fully successful.

The Rehabilitation Rate (Table 2, Figure A)

The rehabilitation rate fell to 58.0 percent in FY 1992 from 59.9 percent in the previous year. This rate was calculated by dividing the number of rehabilitations (191,890) by the sum of rehabilitations and non-rehabilitations (331,025) and multiplying the result by 100. A decrease of one percentage point in the rehabilitation rate accounts for a loss of more than 3,000 rehabilitations. For many years, the rehabilitation, or "success", rate had fluctuated narrowly from about 62 to 65 percent. The 58.0 rate in FY 1992 was the lowest since the mid-1940's and the third lowest in the history of the program.

Severely Disabled Persons Rehabilitated (Table 3, Figures B and C)

Successful rehabilitations among persons with severe disabilities totaled 133,779 in FY 1992, 4.3 percent less than FY 1991 which, in turn, was 4.4% less than FY 1990. Prior to FY 1990, rehabilitations had increased for six consecutive years setting a record of 146,487 in FY 1989. The FY 1992 total was the lowest in eight years.

Overall, 69.7% all persons rehabilitated in FY 1992 were severely disabled, the highest percentage observed in the 19-year history of this statistical series.

The Rehabilitation Rate: Persons with Severe Disabilities (Table 4)

The rehabilitation rate for persons with severe disabilities in FY 1992 was 57.3 percent, i. e., 57.3% of individuals with severe disabilities whose cases were closed from the active statuses were rehabilitated and 42.7% were not. This was a noticeable decrease from the 59.2 percent rate that occurred in FY 1991 and was the lowest rate in the 17 years during which these data have been maintained. In just three years, the rehabilitation rate has fallen by five percentage points (from 62.4% in FY 1989). If the FY 1989 rehabilitation rate were still in effect, nearly 12,000 more persons with severe disabilities would have been rehabilitated in FY 1992.

The rehabilitation rate among individuals classified as non-severely disabled was 59.6 percent in FY 1992 compared to 61.4 percent in FY 1991. This was the first time the rehabilitation rate fell below 60% for these individuals. It would appear that factors making it more difficult for State agencies to effect successful rehabilitations have impacted about equally on clients, regardless of the severity of their disabilities.

III. PERSONS SERVED

All Persons Served (Tables 1, 5 and 6, Figure D)

State agencies served 949,053 persons in FY 1992, a 0.8 percent increase from the 941,771 persons served one year earlier, and the highest number served in the last ten years. "Persons served" is defined as the number of clients accepted for VR services whose cases were open at some time during the year. While the number of persons served in FY 1992 represented the fifth consecutive annual increase, it was only 3.5% more than the recent low of 917,482 experienced in FY 1987. Until FY 1987, the number of persons served had declined for twelve years in a row. The FY 1992 increase reflects a gain in the number of persons with severe disabilities served which exceeds the loss in the number served who did not have a severe disability.

"Persons served" is the sum of clients still receiving services on the last day of the fiscal year (September 30) and the number whose cases were closed out as rehabilitated or not rehabilitated that year. By far, the largest segment of persons served in FY 1992 was represented by those still in receipt of services on September 30, 1992. This amounted to 618,028 persons, or 65.1 percent of all persons served. This proportion has increased for five years in a row starting from 61.9 percent in FY 1987. Thus, increasingly, a person served is one still in receipt of services when the fiscal year ends instead of one whose case is closed out in that year.

Persons with Severe Disabilities Served (Table 7, Figures D and E)

Persons with severe disabilities in receipt of VR services at some time during FY 1992 attained a record of 668,487, or 2.2 percent more than the 654,038 persons served in FY 1991. This was the fourth successive annual increase. The increase in the last five years has been substantial, approximating 85,000 persons. In the same interval, nearly 53,000 fewer persons with non-severe disabilities were served. The latter group declined by 2.4 percent in FY 1992 to 280,566, the lowest

such total recorded.

The proportion of all persons served who were severely disabled reached its highest level in FY 1992, 70.4 percent. There has never been a yearly decrease in this percentage.

IV. NEW ACCEPTANCES

All Persons Accepted for Services (Table 8, Figure E)

State agencies accepted 346,325 persons for VR services in FY 1992, a decrease of 1.6 percent from the 351,916 acceptances in FY 1991. Although this was the third consecutive decline, the total was consistent with the fairly narrow range of acceptances observed in the last decade, about 350,000 plus or minus 5,000.

The Acceptance Rate (Table 8, Figure F)

While the number of individuals accepted for services in FY 1992 declined by 1.6 percent to 346,325, the number whose cases were closed as not accepted declined only slightly-- by 0.2 percent to 266,309. Those accepted for services accounted for 56.5 percent of all individuals whose eligibility for VR services was determined. This was the lowest acceptance rate in ten years. The most recent high point in the acceptance rate was in FY 1985 at 59.5 percent. A decrease in the rate of one percentage point means that about 6,000 fewer persons will have been accepted for vocational rehabilitation services.

Persons with Severe Disabilities Accepted for Services (Table 9)

State agencies accepted 249,791 persons with a severe disability for services in FY 1992, an increase of 1.7 percent from 245,505 in FY 1991. This was the fourth gain in five years, and the highest number of new acceptances among persons with severe disabilities yet recorded.

The number of persons with non-severe disabilities accepted for services declined by 9.3 percent in FY 1992, falling below 100,000 for the first time (96,534). This brought the proportion of all persons accepted for VR in FY 1992 who had severe disabilities to 72.1 percent, an all-time high.

V. NEW APPLICANTS (Tables 10 and 11)

The number of individuals applying for vocational rehabilitation services in FY 1992 totaled 620,332, a very slight decline (0.1 percent) from the number applying in FY 1991 (620,943). This was the third small decrease in as many years. Concurrently, the backlog of applicants awaiting determination of their eligibility increased by 1.9 percent to 280,690 on September 30, 1992 from 275,548 on September 30, 1991, the eighth successive annual rise. This was also the largest number of applicants awaiting eligibility determination on the last day of a fiscal year in twelve years.

VI. TOTAL AGENCY WORKLOAD (Tables 5, 10 and 11, Figure E)

The total agency workload of cases, made up of both applicants and clients in all stages of the rehabilitation process, increased for the eighth year in a row to 1,514,477, or 0.9 percent more than in FY 1991. This was the highest workload total since FY 1981.

Total workload can be calculated in either of two ways and each method is instructive in revealing how State agency caseloads are developing. First, total workload is the sum of all case closures during a fiscal year, regardless of the type of closure, and the number of cases in various stages of the rehabilitation process on September 30, the last day of the fiscal year. The workload increase in FY 1992 was driven solely by the increase in the number of cases open on September 30, 1992 compared to the same date one year earlier. The total of these end-of-year cases was 917,143, about 22,300 more than on September 30, 1991, the highest backlog of cases in twelve years. The number of closures in FY 1992 (597,334), however, was approximately 8,500 less than in the prior year. The decline in the number of closures was accounted for almost entirely by the decrease in persons rehabilitated.

Total workload is also determined by summing the number of new applications for rehabilitation services in a fiscal year and the number of cases in various stages of the rehabilitation process on October 1, the first day of the same fiscal year. The workload increase in FY 1992 was driven entirely by the larger number of cases in agency caseloads on October 1, 1992 than on the same date in the previous year. These cases totaled 894,145 on October 1, 1992, about 14,400 more than on October 1, 1991. New applications for services, however, were 620,332 in FY 1992, only 611 less than in FY 1991.

In summation, numbers of cases remaining in the VR process are continuing to rise while (a) closure activity is diminishing, especially closures of successful rehabilitations, and (b) intake activity, as defined by new applications, has leveled off.