

Alaskan Employer Perspectives on Hiring Individuals with Disabilities

Summary Report

Prepared by:

Lanny Mommsen, MPH, Research Analyst III

and

Kristin Vandagriff, Executive Director

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Summary

This is a follow up to the 2015 report Alaskan Employer Perspectives on Hiring Individuals with Disabilities. Please refer to this report at:

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Documents/Publications/pdf/2016EmployerPerspectives.pdf> for historical data and significance.

Survey results included overall positive experiences for those employers that had hired individuals with disabilities. Generally, employers thought “some” or “most” individuals with disabilities could be employed but in general they felt employers were still uncomfortable with doing so. In addition, “hidden” disabilities such as chronic alcoholism and substance abuse were not as easily perceived disabilities by employers, when compared with more “visible” disabilities (i.e. utilizing a wheelchair). There is a positive trend towards becoming more comfortable compared to the 2015 survey. There is also an increase in 2018 of those that reported hiring someone with a disability before (71.83% vs 58.82%). With respect to barriers to hiring people with disabilities, the largest concerns are: how to handle the situation if the employee does not work out, unfamiliarity with reasonable accommodations, lost productivity and increased costs. Recommendations for change include educational programs for employers that focus on awareness of various disabilities, instructions on how to include and integrate diverse groups of people in the workplace, and information on accessing resources, supports, and making reasonable accommodations.

Methods

Fall, 2018, staff of the GCDSE disseminated a paper survey to approximately 200 conference attendees from approximately 150 Alaskan businesses at the 2018 Alaska Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Conference in Anchorage, Alaska. The paper survey was distributed and collected during and right after the keynote address on hiring people with disabilities. Prior to having attendees complete the survey, GCDSE staff gave a brief introduction to the survey.

Survey

Employment project lead Kristin Vandagriff developed the quantitative and qualitative survey questions based on ongoing perceived barriers to increasing employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities in 2015 and this same survey was used again in 2018 to compare data (see Appendix, page 13). More information on the development of this survey can be found at:

(<http://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Documents/Publications/pdf/2016EmployerPerspectives.pdf>)

Analysis

The completed paper surveys were inputted into Survey Monkey for electronic record-keeping and analysis. Data were then downloaded into Excel and Word to produce descriptive statistical charts and graphs. Open-ended responses were coded using a line-by-line technique. These responses were then grouped into themes, described below.

Results

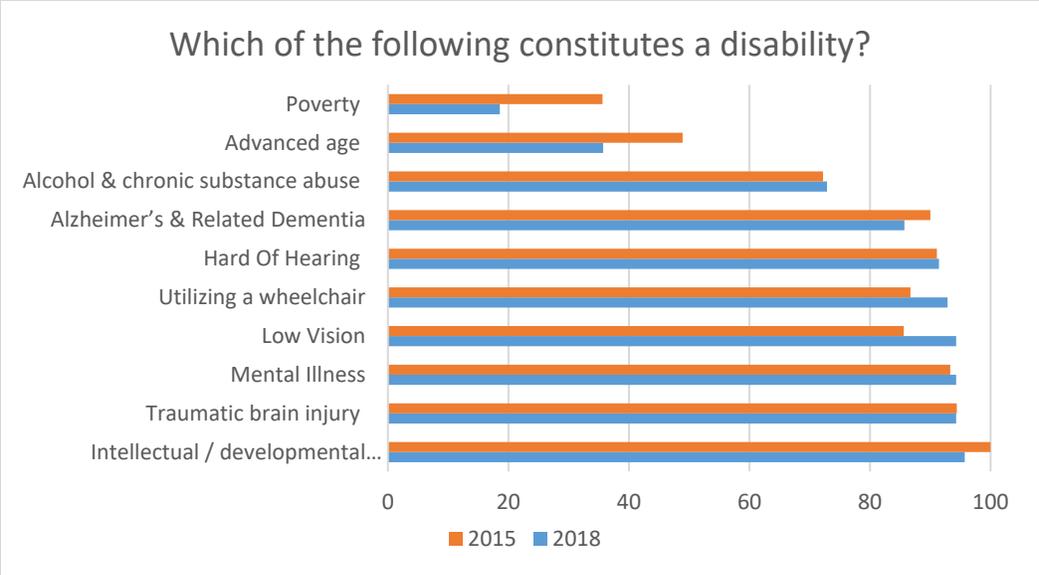
Seventy two (72) respondents completed and returned the survey, 13 of which were federal contractors. Not all respondents answered every question. Additionally, several questions were “check all that apply” or open-ended responses (see Appendix, page 13).

Quantitative Results

Which of the following constitutes a disability:

Although the respondents recognized intellectual and developmental disabilities, traumatic brain injury, mental illness, low vision and utilizing a wheelchair constituted forms of “disability” the most, there was variability in the rest of the responses. Respondents were less likely to recognize alcohol and chronic substance abuse as well as Alzheimer’s & related dementia as disabilities. Likewise, several participants were thrown off by the options of “advanced age” and “poverty” as potential disabilities, marking them as disabilities although they are not legally considered as such in Alaska.

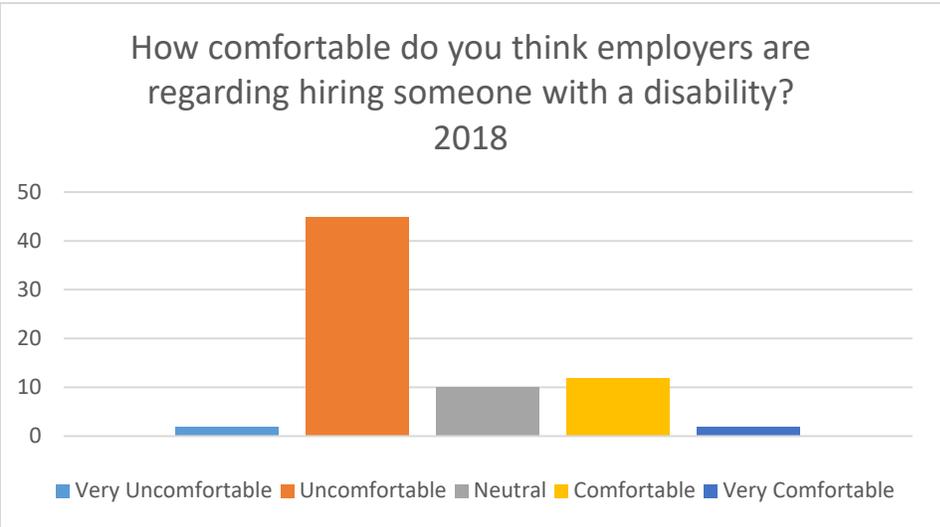
Which of the following constitutes a disability? (please choose all that apply)		
2018		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
<i>Intellectual / developmental challenges</i>	<i>95.71</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Traumatic brain injury</i>	<i>94.29</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>Mental illness</i>	<i>94.29</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>Low Vision</i>	<i>94.29</i>	<i>66</i>
Utilizing a wheelchair	92.86	65
Hard Of Hearing	91.43	64
Alzheimer’s & Related Dementia	85.71	60
Alcohol & chronic substance abuse	72.86	51
<i>Advanced age</i>	<i>35.71</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Poverty</i>	<i>18.57</i>	<i>13</i>
	<i>answered question</i>	70
	<i>skipped question</i>	2

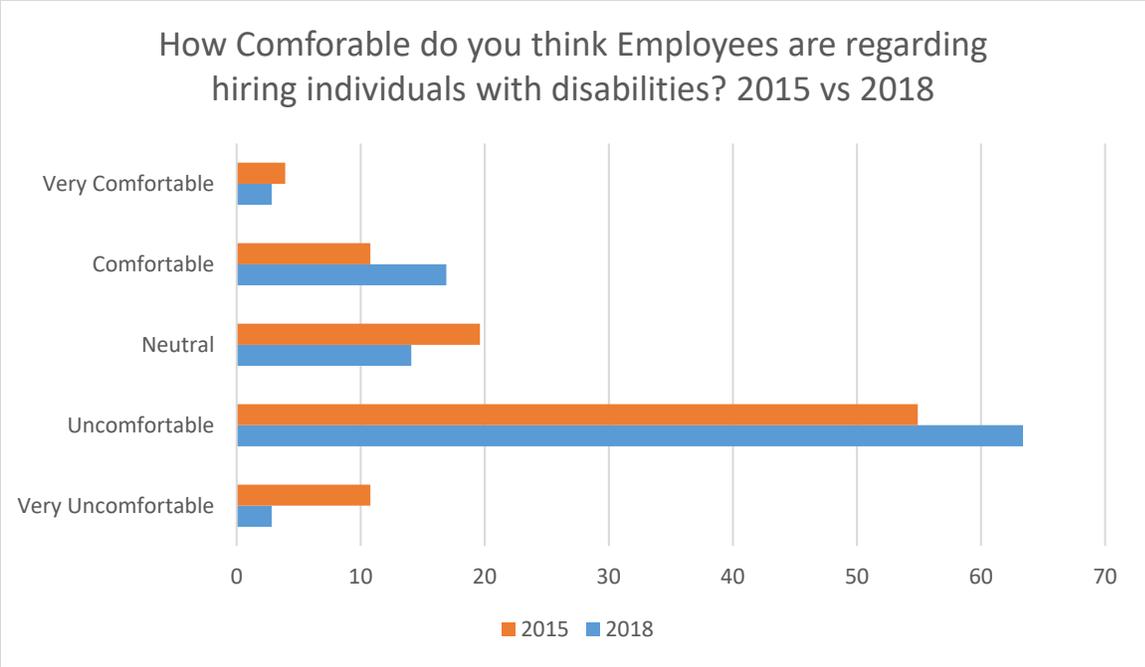


Comparing 2015 to 2018, significantly less respondents identified Poverty and Advanced Age as disabilities (Poverty 35.6% [2015] vs 18.6% [2018] and Advanced Age 48.9% [2015] vs 35.7% [2018]). This shows an increased ability to identify which conditions don't legally qualify as disabilities in Alaska. In 5 of the 8 disability categories, more respondents identified disabilities correctly in 2018. In 2 of the disability categories, less respondents identified disabilities correctly in 2018 and 1 category had no change. Overall, more respondents correctly identified correct disability categories and were less likely to incorrectly identify the categories that were not considered disabilities in 2018 vs 2015.

How comfortable do you think employers are:

Alaskan employers largely report discomfort at the idea of employing people with disabilities. The largest answer options chosen were "uncomfortable" (63.38%) while only 19.72% answered that they believed employers were "comfortable" or "very comfortable" employing people with disabilities (N = 14).

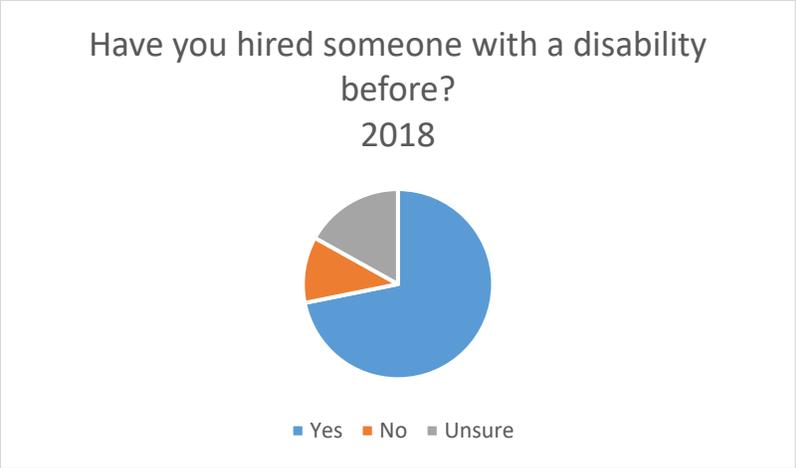


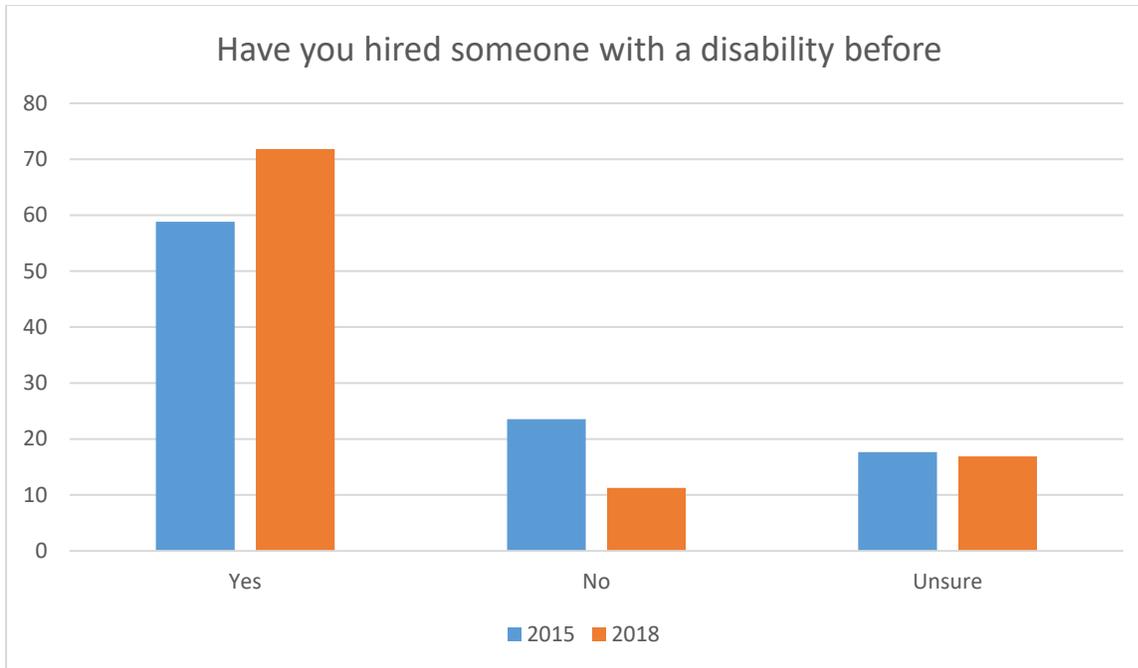


In 2018 there was a large drop in the number of people who responded that they were “very Uncomfortable” with idea of employing people with disabilities (2.82% vs 10.78%). Additionally, more respondents reported that they were “Comfortable” with idea of employing people with disabilities (16.9% vs 10.78%). Both of these are progress in the correct direction. However, there was an increase respondents reported that they were “Uncomfortable” with idea of employing people with disabilities (63.38% vs 54.9%) and a slight decrease in those that responded they were “very comfortable”.

Have you hired someone with a disability?

Despite perceived discomfort about employing people with disabilities, most survey respondents (71.83%) indicated that they had hired someone with a disability (N=51) at some point in their careers. An additional 16.90% were unsure if their employees had disabilities (N=12).

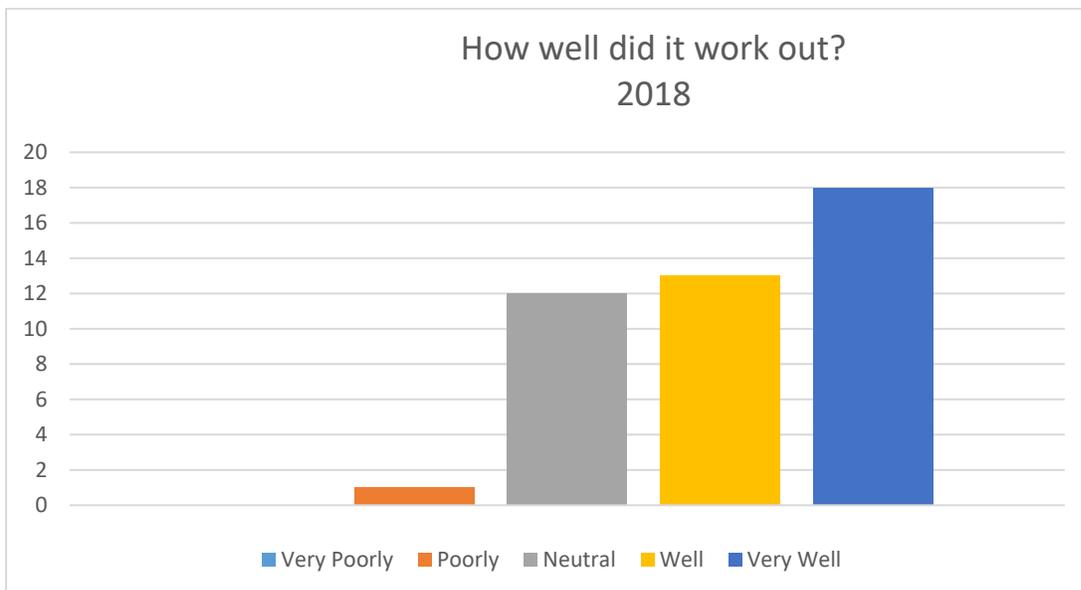


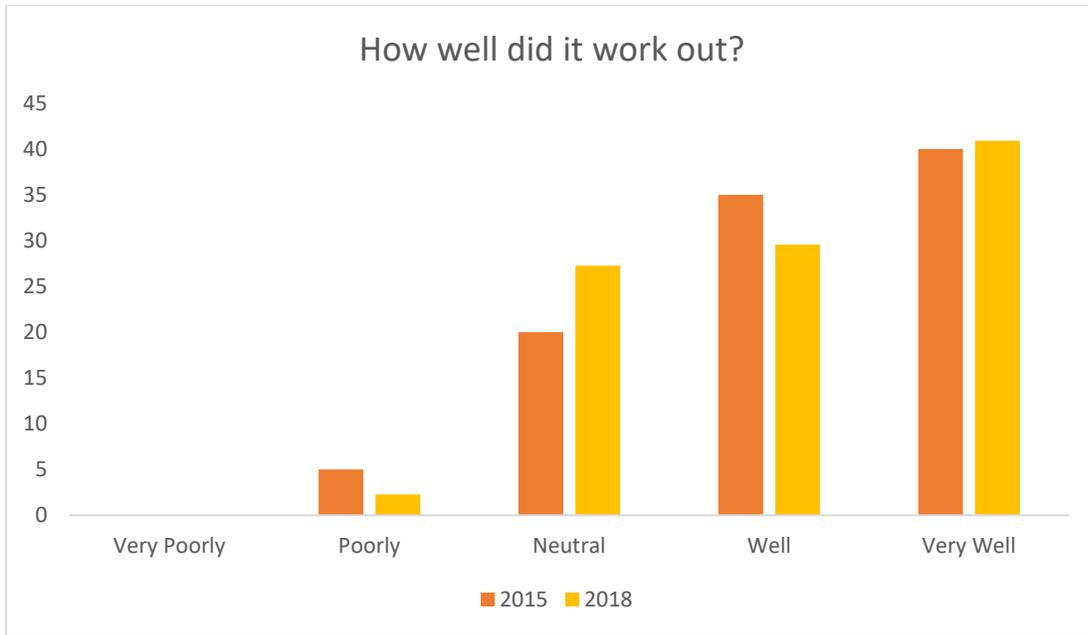


There was an increase in 2018 of those that reported they have hired someone with a disability before (71.83% vs 58.82%) and a similar decrease in those that reported had not hired someone with a disability before (11.27% vs 23.53%).

How well did it work out:

For those employers who have hired people with disabilities before, 44 respondents rated how well they believed these individuals fit in at the organization. In general, employers believed their employees with disabilities worked out “well,” “very well,” or “neutral” in their agencies (97.73%). Only one respondent reported it worked out “poorly”.





There was small variations between those who responded in 2018 vs 2015. Slightly more said their experience was neutral, slightly less said it worked out well, and slightly less said it worked out poorly.

What are the barriers for hiring an individual with a disability?

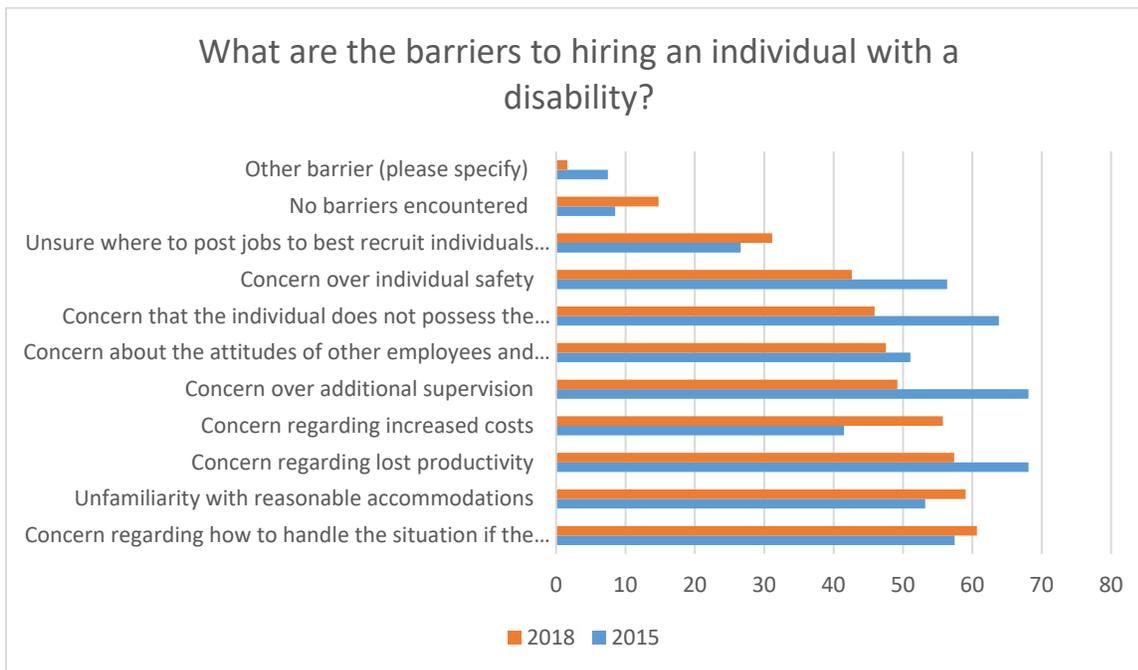
When provided with a selection of possible employment barriers to choose from, respondents were able to identify several reasons why employers may not hire those with disabilities.

The main barriers identified were concern about: how to handle the situation if the employee does not work out, reasonable accommodations, increased costs and loss of productivity. Secondary concerns included additional supervision, necessary skills/training for the job, attitudes of other employees, and individual safety. Nine (N=9) respondents reported no barriers and 1 respondents wrote in their own barrier (state licensing/joint commission).

What are the barriers for hiring an individual with a disability? 2018

(please choose all that apply)

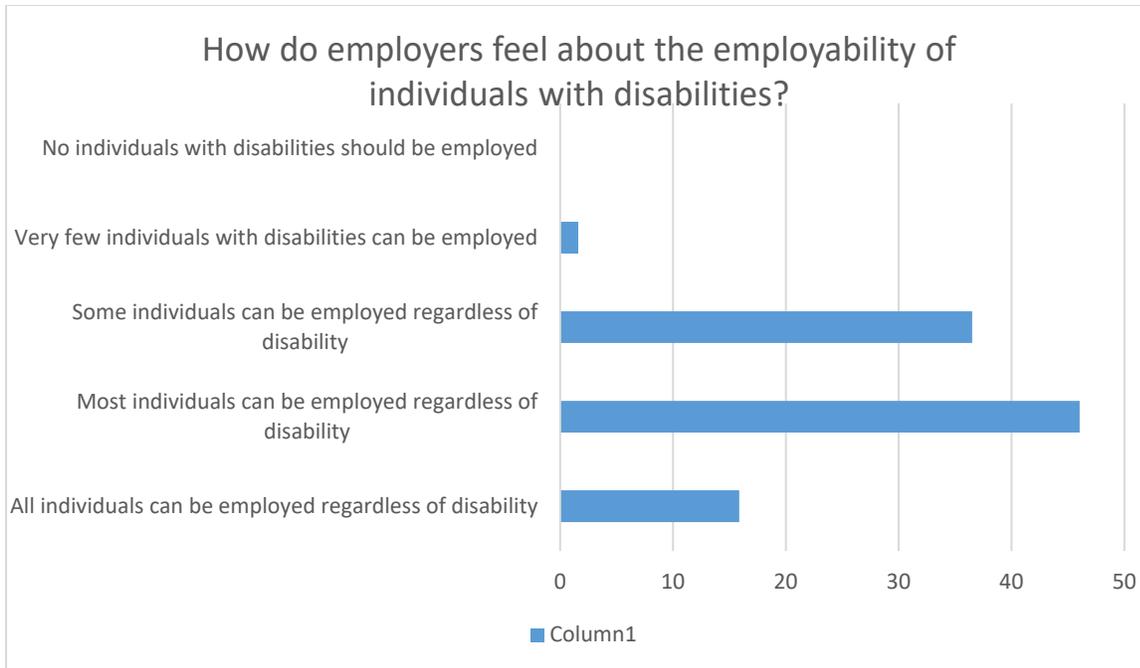
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Concern regarding how to handle the situation if the employee does not work out	60.66%	37
Unfamiliarity with reasonable accommodations	59.02%	36
Concern regarding lost productivity	57.38%	35
Concern regarding increased costs	55.74%	34
Concern over additional supervision	49.18%	30
Concern about the attitudes of other employees and co-workers towards people with disabilities	47.54%	29
Concern that the individual does not possess the necessary skills/training for the job	45.90%	28
Concern over individual safety	42.62%	26
Unsure where to post jobs to best recruit individuals with disabilities	31.15%	16
No barriers encountered	14.75%	9
Other barrier (please specify)	1.64%	1
answered question		61
skipped question		11



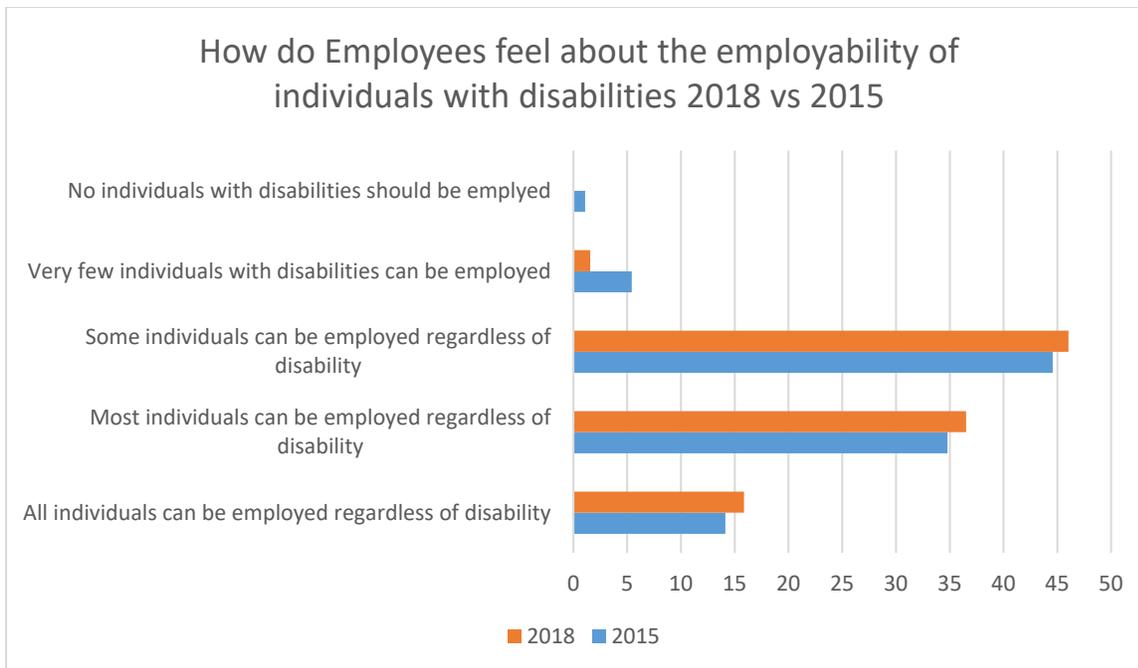
Comparing 2018 to 2015 there was overall less concerns about barriers. Six of the areas had smaller percentages of respondents reports concern as compared to four areas in 2018 that had more concerns. Furthermore, more respondents in 2018 reported “no barriers encountered”.

Of the 13 federal contractors to take the survey, only two (14.29%) reported meeting their 7% utilization goal under section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act and 57.14% of respondents reported being “unsure” (N=8). Four employers (28.57%) indicated that they have not met the 7% goal. This was a smaller sample size than in 2015 where 31 federal contractors took the survey and three (9.7%) reported meeting their 7% utilization goal and 54.8% reported being “unsure”.

How do Employers feel about the employability?



A majority of respondents (N =52) reported that employers believe “most” or “some” individuals with disabilities are employable (82.54%). Only 10 employers believed that all individuals with disabilities were employable (15.87%), and only 1 respondents believed that “very few” to “no” individuals with disabilities were employable (1.59%).



Respondents to the 2018 survey had slightly more positive perceptions about the employability of individuals with disabilities across all categories.

Qualitative Results

When asked to describe employers comfort levels regarding hiring someone with a disability, employers wrote in responses that fit several main themes in regards to discomfort; employers have little or no experience with disabilities so they are uncomfortable (N=6), concern over accommodations (N=6), employers are uneducated about disabilities (N=3) and concerned about the unknown (N=3). These are some of the same concerns that are reflected in the qualitative question above. Responses on the unknown/uncomfortable themes show that there is room for change.

“the unknown can be intimidating”

“it is the fear of the unknown”

“lack of knowledge makes them worried they will do or say the wrong thing”

However, there were five responses that stated they were comfortable/worked with individuals with disabilities or employees are becoming more comfortable over time.

When asked if they have hired individuals with disabilities before, we asked respondents to tell us more about the nature of these disabilities. Since not all individuals with disabilities self-disclose their disabilities, this cannot be taken as an exhaustive list. Among those employers who were aware of their employee’s disabilities and reported them on the survey, 17 indicated hiring individuals with physical disabilities, such as paraplegic, individual with mobility challenge, or a wheelchair. Ten (10) respondents indicated working with individuals who experience mental illness, 7 who experience intellectual / developmental disabilities, 6 reported those who were deaf or hard of hearing, 4 with low vision, and 1

each with Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBIs), substance abuse, and neurological condition. Again, please note that mental illness, TBI, and substance abuse may be non-apparent disabilities that are underreported here.

When asked if they have hired individuals with disabilities before, respondents were encouraged to describe their experiences on how well these individuals worked out in their organizations. The responses were mostly positive (N = 11), 2 negative responses, 6 responses that were mixed (reported it depended on the situation) and 5 responses that were neutral.

Positive responses included things such as:

“They have all worked hard. It has been gratifying to see them thrive thought success at the job”

“Best employee”

“Productivity was strong with the use of a cane”

The mixed reported:

“Some did, Some didn’t”

Just like with employees without disabilities, sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t”

“It depends on the supervisor and the employee”

“1. Very poorly (nothing to do with disability) 2. Well 3. Disappointing”

Conclusions and Recommendations

Survey results included overall positive experiences for those employers that had hired individuals with disabilities. Generally, employers thought “some” or “most” individuals with disabilities could be employed but in general they felt employers were still uncomfortable with doing so. Employers wrote in a lot of responses about being uncomfortable with the unknown as well as concern over accommodations. This leads to these recommendations:

Individuals with disabilities co-facilitating presentations on employing people with disabilities

Continue to increase education efforts geared towards employers on employment for individuals with disabilities, especially through individuals with disabilities co-facilitating presentations. This aligns with the DD Shared Vision and the Council’s federal ACL Living Well grant that have been moving towards individuals with disabilities co-facilitating presentations. Furthermore, this would help with employers that reported they were uncomfortable with the unknown or feared the unknown.

Describe Reasonable Accommodations & Average costs of Accommodations

Since employers are unfamiliar with reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities, they fear this carries an inordinate amount of cost or risk. Trainings that show how accommodations were made in particular work environments generally at very low cost, the average costs of accommodations, as well as information on other resources to assist with accommodations are recommended.

Along with the small incremental positive changes we still find the past recommendations from the 2015 report to still be relevant:

- *Continue interagency collaborations which seek to make employers aware of resources, supports, and reasonable accommodations;*
- *Develop employer-specific trainings on best practices associated with recruiting, interviewing, hiring, and retaining employees with disabilities;*
- *Educational programming and public service media should include individuals with disabilities, emphasize skills and reasonable accommodations, share success stories from employers, and show individuals with disabilities in many different occupations presenting a variety of different skills and different types of disabilities;*
- *Increased employer utilization of job shadowing, mentor opportunities, and internships for individuals with disabilities as part of a company business practice to further awareness of skills and heighten employer expectations;*
- *Launch a pilot project with employers to test the reliability and validity of electronic portfolios and other innovative technology in the hiring process; and*
- *Continue targeted outreach and educational opportunities to federal contractors to alleviate barriers to reaching their 7% utilization goal.*



Employer Survey:
Employing Individuals with Disabilities

1. Which of the following constitutes a disability? *(please circle all that apply)*

- a. Utilizing a wheelchair
- b. Intellectual/developmental challenges
- c. Mental illness
- d. Alzheimer's & related dementia
- e. Advanced age
- f. low vision
- g. hard of hearing
- h. Poverty
- i. Traumatic brain injury
- j. Alcohol and chronic substance abuse

	Very uncomfortable	Un-comfortable	Neutral	Comfortable	Very comfortable
2a. How comfortable do you think employers are regarding hiring someone with a disability?	<input type="radio"/>				

2b. Please describe:

3a. Have you hired someone with a disability before? *(please circle one)*

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure *(If no or unsure, please skip to #5)*

3b. If so, please describe:



	Very Poorly	Poorly	Neutral	Well	Very Well
4a. If so, how did it work out?	<input type="radio"/>				

4b. Please describe:

5. What are the barriers for hiring an individual with a disability? (please circle all that apply)

- a. Concern regarding increased costs
- b. Concern regarding additional supervision
- c. Concern regarding loss of productivity
- d. Concern that the individual does not possess the necessary skills/training for the job
- e. Concern regarding how to handle the situation if the employee does not work out
- f. Concern about the attitudes of other employees and co-workers towards people with disabilities
- g. Unfamiliarity with reasonable accommodations
- h. Concern over individual safety
- i. Unsure where to post jobs to best recruit individuals with disabilities
- j. Other _____
- k. No barriers encountered

6. Are you a federal contractor? (please circle one)

Yes or No (If yes, please complete #7, if no, please skip to #8)

7. Have you met the 7% utilization goal put forward by the Section 503 new regulation in the Rehabilitation Act? (please circle one)

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

8. How do employers feel about the employability of individuals with disabilities? (please circle one)

- d. All individuals can be employed regardless of disability
- e. Most individuals can be employed regardless of disability
- f. Some individuals can be employed regardless of disability
- g. Very few individuals with disabilities can be employed
- h. No individuals with disabilities should be employed