

CASELOAD HIGHLIGHTS AND SUMMARY THROUGH FISCAL YEAR 1993

I. INTRODUCTION

Caseload trends in the State-Federal Program of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) have tended to change gradually over time, if at all. The FY 1993 experience, however, was unlike any other in its very large caseload shifts from the prior year spurred by two new features of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992. Dramatic caseload differences observed in FY 1993 resulted from (a) the requirement to process applications for rehabilitation services within 60 days and (b) the presumption that all applicants can benefit from rehabilitation services unless the State rehabilitation agency can demonstrate otherwise.

The 60-day requirement led to a rapid decline in the number of persons classified as applicants, while the presumption of being able to benefit led to higher numbers and proportions of applicants being accepted for services and entering the active statuses. Included among these newly eligible individuals are persons who may not receive rehabilitation services because they do not meet a State agency's order of selection priorities. Such priorities are applied when a State agency does not have sufficient resources to serve all eligible persons. Current reporting practices do not permit the separate identification of individuals for whom services will be delayed, and some statistical comparisons between FY 1993 and earlier years cannot be fully and successfully drawn. Terms like "persons served", "rehabilitation rate" and "acceptance rate" do not mean the same as they did before the 1992 Amendments. Several of the large year-to-year changes cited in this report, then, are direct results of the new requirements in law. The reporting system will be revised so that appropriate distinctions can be made in the future.

II. SUMMARY

Large increases occurred in the number of applicant cases processed for eligibility, and in the rate that individuals were determined to be eligible for services. This meant a rapid expansion in the number of individuals entering the active (eligible) statuses increasing the count of persons in these statuses to more than one million for the first time in 12 years (1,048,527). The number remaining in the eligible statuses at the end of FY 1993 increased to its highest level in 15 years (699,991). These totals include persons not meeting an agency's order of selection priorities for whom services will be delayed and, perhaps, not delivered at all.

The rehabilitation, or "success", rate among cases closed after acceptance for services, as traditionally calculated, fell to its lowest level since the mid-1940's (55.7 percent). The rehabilitation rate for persons with severe disabilities also

declined (55.1 percent). It must be noted, however, that the rehabilitation rate is one of the measurements whose comparability to earlier years must be viewed with caution.

Two sets of seemingly contradictory patterns were in operation in FY 1993. The number of persons in the service statuses rose considerably by nearly 100,000, yet the total workload of applicants and clients in State agency caseloads expanded by only 20,000. Similarly, despite the very large increase in the carryover of active cases in State agency caseloads at the end of FY 1993 (up 82,000 from the same date a year earlier), the total number of cases at all stages of the VR process actually declined by 13,000. These unusual patterns are explained by the shift of a large number of cases from the applicant status to the statuses where individuals are to receive the full range of rehabilitation services (the active, or eligible, statuses). [In this context, the terms active, eligible, and service statuses mean the same thing.]

The number of persons who were successfully rehabilitated in FY 1993 was 193,994 while rehabilitations of persons with severe disabilities totaled 138,290; in both instances, these were the first increases in four years.

Persons with severe disabilities in the service statuses increased for the eighth time in as many years to the highest number ever (762,218) while those accepted to receive VR services exceeded 300,000 for the first time (323,339). Also, persons with severe disabilities accounted for more than seventy percent of all persons in State agency caseloads, setting record highs (e.g., 72.7 percent of all eligible persons in FY 1993).

The foregoing trends are described more fully in the analysis below containing references to the 12 historical tables and seven 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 1993.

III. REHABILITATIONS

All Persons Rehabilitated (Tables 1, 2 and 6, Figure A)

State agencies rehabilitated 193,994 persons in FY 1993, a 1.1 percent increase from the number rehabilitated in FY 1992 (191,890). This was the first gain in four years. In the same span of time, by contrast, the number of persons who could not be rehabilitated rose in each of the four years, with FY 1993 totalling 154,542 persons, or 11.1 percent more than in FY 1992.

The Rehabilitation Rate (Table 2, Figure A)

The rehabilitation, or "success", rate fell to 55.7 percent in FY 1993 from 58.0 percent in the previous year. The rehabilitation rate was calculated by dividing the number of rehabilitations (193,994) by the sum of rehabilitations and non-rehabilitations (348,536) and multiplying the result by 100. The 55.7 percent rate in FY 1993 was the lowest in 48 years (since FY 1946) and the third lowest in the history of the program. As indicated above, however, the lowered rate resulted, in part, from provisions of the 1992 Amendments and is not fully comparable to those for earlier years.

Behind FY 1993's rehabilitation rate was an increase in rehabilitations of only 2,100 persons from FY 1992 and a larger increase in those not rehabilitated of 15,400. Nearly two-thirds of the rise in non-rehabilitations were accounted for by eligible persons not receiving services beyond assessment, a group traditionally accounting for only 20 percent of all those who are not rehabilitated. This finding reflects case closures of (a) individuals who previously would not have been deemed eligible for services and (b) those eligible for VR, but not meeting an agency's order of selection priorities.

Severely Disabled Persons Rehabilitated (Tables 3, 4 and 12, Figures B and C)

Successful rehabilitations among persons with severe disabilities totaled 138,290 in FY 1993, 3.4 percent more than in FY 1992. This broke a three-year cycle of losses. Prior to FY 1990, rehabilitations had increased for six consecutive years setting a record of 146,487 in FY 1989.

Overall, 71.3 percent all persons rehabilitated in FY 1993 were severely disabled, the highest percentage observed in the 20-year history of this statistical series. The FY 1992 rate was 69.7 percent.

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

The rehabilitation rate for persons with severe disabilities in FY 1993 was 55.1 percent, i.e., 55.1 percent of individuals with severe disabilities whose cases were closed from the active statuses were rehabilitated and 44.9 percent were not. The rehabilitation rate for FY 1992 was 57.3 percent. In just four years, the rehabilitation rate has fallen by more than seven percentage points (from 62.4 percent in FY 1989).

The rehabilitation rate among individuals classified as not severely disabled was 57.0 percent in FY 1993 compared to 59.6 percent in FY 1992. Until recent years, the rehabilitation rate for non-severely disabled persons had tended to vary from about 64 percent to 68 percent. It would appear that factors making it more difficult for State agencies to effect successful rehabilitations

have impacted about equally on all individuals, regardless of the severity of their disabilities.

IV. PERSONS SERVED

All Persons Served (Tables 1, 5, 6 and 11, Figure D)

There were 1,048,527 persons in the service statuses during FY 1993, a 10.5 percent increase from the 949,053 count one year earlier, and the highest such total since FY 1980. "Persons served" is defined as the number of persons eligible for VR services whose cases were open at some time during the year. The definition, however, includes eligible individuals not meeting a State agency's order of selection priorities for whom the delivery of services will be delayed. A major problem of comparability arose in FY 1993 because of the newly instituted presumption that all disabled applicants can benefit from VR services and are eligible to receive them unless the State agency can prove otherwise. This meant that possibly sizable numbers of applicants previously not accepted for services were now deemed eligible for them and were advanced to the service statuses. In time, the number of eligible persons whose services have been delayed will be separately identified in caseload data.

"Persons served" is the sum of clients recorded as being in the service statuses 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 so defined in FY 1993 was represented by those in the service statuses on September 30, 1993. These individuals totaled 699,991, or 66.8 percent of all 1,048,527 persons in the service statuses. The proportion has increased for six years in a row starting with 61.9 percent in FY 1987. Thus, increasingly, a person served is one still in the service statuses when the fiscal year ends.

Persons with Severe Disabilities Served (Tables 7 and 12, Figures D and E)

Persons with severe disabilities in the eligible statuses at some time during FY 1993 totalled a record 762,218, or 14.0 percent more than the total of 668,487 persons in FY 1992. This was the seventh straight annual gain. The increase when compared to FY 1988 has been substantial, nearly 162,000 persons. The same five-year comparison shows over 32,000 fewer persons with non-severe disabilities in the service statuses. The proportion of all persons served who were severely disabled reached its highest level in FY 1993, 72.7 percent. This percentage has increased every year.

V. NEW ACCEPTANCES

All Persons Accepted for Services (Tables 6, 8 and 10, Figure F)

The number of applicants accepted for services, i.e., determined eligible, in FY 1993 broke with past trends. In the previous ten years, this total had stabilized at about 350,000 per year plus or minus three percent. In FY 1993, however, the number of newly eligible persons, given the focus of the 1992 Amendments, rose to 430,269, an increase of 24.2 percent from FY 1992. This was the highest intake of new acceptances since FY 1977.

The Acceptance Rate (Table 8, Figure F)

The 24.2 percent gain in applicants accepted for services in FY 1993 overshadowed the modest increase in those not accepted, a rise of 5.7 percent to 281,588. Persons accepted for services accounted for 60.4 percent of all applicants whose eligibility was decided upon. This rate of acceptance was four percentage points higher than in FY 1992 (56.5 percent). It was also the highest acceptance rate in 18 years, and was a direct result of the new presumption that all disabled applicants can benefit from VR services.

Persons with Severe Disabilities Accepted for Services (Tables 9 and 12)

State agencies accepted 323,339 persons with a severe disability for services in FY 1993, a large increase of 29.4 percent from 249,791 in FY 1992. This was the sixth gain in seven years, but, more importantly, represented the highest number of new acceptances among persons with severe disabilities yet recorded. It is expected that the large majority of these newly accepted individuals are in a position to receive rehabilitation services without delay because of the severity of their disabilities.

The number of persons with non-severe disabilities accepted for services also increased (by 8.8 percent) in FY 1993, topping the 100,000 level once more (106,930). This brought the proportion of all persons accepted for VR in FY 1993 who had severe disabilities to 75.1 percent, an all-time high.

VI. NEW APPLICANTS (Tables 6, 10 and 11)

Persons applying for rehabilitation services in FY 1993 totaled 617,463, a slight decline (0.5 percent) from the number applying in FY 1992, and the fourth small decrease in as many years.

While the statistic for new applicants was apparently not affected by the 1992 Amendments, the number of applicant cases awaiting eligibility determination on September 30, 1993 was heavily impacted. The latter stood at 184,162 persons, about 96,500 persons less than on the same date one year earlier (280,690 on September 30, 1992). This 34.4 percent decrease broke a streak of eight consecutive annual increases during which time the end-of-year backlog slowly rose by 32,000 cases to September 30, 1992.

The total of 184,162 was the smallest number of applicants awaiting eligibility determination on the last day of a fiscal year in 26 years. This may be attributed to the 1992 Amendments requiring eligibility determinations to be completed in 60 days.

VII. TOTAL AGENCY WORKLOAD (Tables 5, 10 and 11, Figures G and H)

The total agency workload of cases, made up of both applicants and clients in all stages of the rehabilitation process, increased for the ninth year in a row to 1,534,254, or 1.3 percent more than in FY 1992. This was the highest workload count since FY 1981.

Total workload can be calculated in either of two ways and each method is instructive in revealing what contributes to the quantitative changes in State agency caseloads. First, total workload is the sum of (a) all case closures during a fiscal year, regardless of the type of closure, and (b) the number of cases in various stages of the rehabilitation process on September 30, the last day of the fiscal year. Using these components, the workload increase in FY 1993 of approximately 19,600 is seen as a function of the increase in the number of cases closed in FY 1993 to 630,124, a rise of nearly 33,000 cases from FY 1992, or 5.5 percent. Most of the closures, in turn, were accounted for by applicants not accepted for services (up 13,900) and closures not rehabilitated before any services were delivered (up 9,600). [A decline was noted in the end-of-year total of cases in all stages of the VR process, down about 13,000 to 904,130, or 1.4 percent.]

Total workload is also determined by summing (a) the number of new applications for rehabilitation services in a fiscal year and (b) 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 of about 19,600 in FY 1993 is seen to have been driven by the larger number of cases in agency caseloads on October 1, 1992 than on the same date in the previous year. These carried over cases totaled 916,791, about 22,600 more than on October 1, 1991, or 2.5 percent. [New applications for services were 617,463 in FY 1993, a decrease of 2,900 cases, or 0.5 percent from FY 1992.]

In summation, workloads in State agencies rose slightly in FY 1993 with the four broadest workload components--cases on hand at the beginning and end of the fiscal year, and new applications and closures throughout the year--changing little. While these FY 1993 measurements followed recent trends, smaller caseload segments such as applicant and eligible cases on September 30 veered in opposite directions in just one year. The sudden shift of cases from one part of the caseload to another is an outgrowth of the 1992 Amendments which presumed that applicants could benefit from services and required eligibility decisions to be made in 60 days.

Summary of caseload indicators: Number and percent change, FY 1992 to 1993

| KEY INDICATORS | Fiscal Year | | Percent change |
|--|-------------|-----------|----------------|
| | 1992 | 1993 | |
| A. ALL PERSONS | | | |
| 1. New applicants during year | 620,332 | 617,463 | - 0.5 |
| 2. Applicants, September 30 | 280,690 | 184,162 | -34.4 |
| 3. Newly eligible during year | 346,325 | 430,269 | +24.2 |
| 4. Acceptance rate <u>1/</u> | 56.5% | 60.4% | + 6.9 |
| 5. Active cases, September 30 | 618,028 | 699,991 | +13.3 |
| 6. Rehabilitations | 191,890 | 193,994 | + 1.1 |
| 7. Rehabilitation rate <u>2/</u> | 58.0% | 55.7% | - 4.0 |
| 8. Served - all eligibles in year | 949,053 | 1,048,527 | +10.5 |
| 9. Total workload - all statuses | 1,514,477 | 1,534,254 | + 1.3 |
| B. SEVERELY DISABLED PERSONS | | | |
| 1a. Newly eligible during year | 249,791 | 323,339 | +29.4 |
| 1b. Newly eligible - % of total <u>3/</u> | 72.1% | 75.1% | + 4.2 |
| 2a. Active cases, September 30 | 434,971 | 511,420 | +17.6 |
| 2b. Active cases, September 30 - % of total <u>3/</u> | 70.4% | 73.1% | + 3.8 |
| 3a. Rehabilitations | 133,779 | 138,290 | + 3.4 |
| 3b. Rehabilitations - % of total <u>3/</u> | 69.7% | 71.3% | + 2.3 |
| 4. Rehabilitation rate <u>2/</u> | 57.3% | 55.1% | - 3.8 |
| 5a. Served - all eligibles in year | 668,487 | 762,218 | +14.0 |

5b. Served - % of total 3/ 70.4% 72.7% + 3.3

1/ Percent of applicant decisions leading to acceptance for VR.

2/ Percent of closures from the eligible statuses that are rehabilitated.

3/ Severely disabled persons as a percent of all persons.