

# **FY 2021 Interagency Committee on Disability Research Highlights**

## **Introduction**

In fiscal year (FY) 2021, the Interagency Committee on Disability Research (ICDR) promoted and optimized interagency coordination and collaboration through its activities and continued to implement the [government-wide strategic plan](https://icdr.acl.gov/resources/reports/icdr-government-wide-strategic-plan-2018-2021) required by the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity A](https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title29/chapter16&edition=prelim)ct. In addition to implementing strategic plan activities, the ICDR engaged with stakeholders and continued its ongoing activities to support its overall [mission, goals, and objectives](https://icdr.acl.gov/content/about-us). These activities included:

* Exploring the impact of COVID-19 on disability and rehabilitation research and tracking research projects, initiatives, and activities being conducted by ICDR member agencies, grantees, and partners.
* Launching the Government-Wide Inventory of Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research – The Interagency Rehabilitation and Disability Research Portfolio.
* Publishing resources on the issues of assistive technology and universal design; health care access and quality; employment; emergency preparedness; aging; the impact of COVID-19; and health information technology for members and stakeholders.
* Hosting the Employment for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities virtual symposium.
* Launching a Lunch and Learn series highlighting findings in current aging, disability, and rehabilitation research.
* Supporting continued collaboration among ICDR member agencies and partners by hosting regular Executive Committee (EC) meetings.
* Hosting a public stakeholder meeting.

## **Impact of COVID-19 on Disability and Rehabilitation Research**

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the lives of people with disabilities and disability and rehabilitation research conducted across ICDR member agencies. [*The Impact of COVID-19 on Disability Research: New Challenges and Widening Disparities* white paper](https://icdr.acl.gov/system/files/resources/ICDR%20COVID-19%20White%20Paper_0.docx) describes the impact of the crisis on federal research and, specifically, the impact on disability research attributed to the pandemic. It describes the challenges in continuing research during the pandemic and identifies and explores innovations and emerging topics warranting further exploration in the disability research field.

Throughout FY 2021, ICDR member agencies shared their resources and activities related to COVID-19 and disability. Some examples include:

* The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs research office is engaged in COVID-19 vaccine development and trials and has been very involved with National Institutes of Health partners.
* The Indian Health Services is working with urban Indian organizations regarding COVID-19 vaccine distribution and dissemination.
* The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs released RFAs related to rehabilitation for people who are living with or who have survived COVID-19. This includes mental health and behavioral health (i.e., effects from isolation and social distancing), as well as the long-term neurological and cognitive consequences of COVID-19.
* The Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee maintains a website of coronavirus resources. This includes federal resources related to autism and other disabilities: <https://iacc.hhs.gov/resources/coronavirus/>.
* The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has been working on several COVID-19-related products, including research related to accessible materials for people with disabilities. They also have cooperative agreements in the works regarding individual states, disability, and health.

## **Searchable Government-Wide Inventory of Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requires the ICDR to develop and maintain a searchable government-wide inventory (GWI) of disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research for trend and data analysis across federal agencies. The GWI working group previously identified the National Institutes of Health Library within the Office of Research Services as a resource for this task. During FY 2021, the working group launched the GWI (i.e., the Interagency Rehabilitation and Disability Research Portfolio), with the ontology, security features, visualization, and functionality developed and tested before launch. The current portfolio contributors include the Administration for Community Living, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

## **New ICDR Interagency Resources**

### *Employment: A Toolkit for Interagency Collaboration*

The ICDR *Employment* toolkitpromotes additional research by federal agencies and departments as well as collaboration in the field of employment for people with disabilities by describing current employment resources and providing examples of federal employment promotion activities. It also describes resources on various subtopics focusing on the employment of people with disabilities. In addition, the toolkit identifies unexplored employment research areas that could benefit from interagency collaboration. Examples of areas for future research focusing on technology include examining the economic benefit of designing products for accessibility at the onset versus later revision or modification. Examples focusing on practice and policy include identifying evidence-based practices to support youth transition to postsecondary education and employment, developing opportunities to scale transition interventions, and advancing the study of career pathways that include people with disabilities. The toolkit is posted on the ICDR website at this link: <https://icdr.acl.gov/system/files/resources/EMP-Toolkit.3.9.21_508.pdf>

### *Health Care Access and Quality for People with Disabilities: A Toolkit for Interagency Collaboration*

The ICDR’s *Health Care Access and Quality for People with Disabilities* toolkit provides resources for future research on health care access and equity to address the health disparity issues that people with disabilities face. The toolkit includes an overview of federal programs and research, best practices, and areas for future research on health care access and quality for people with disabilities. Examples of areas for future research include access to adaptive equipment, the impact of delaying medical care due to cost, local approaches to resolving access challenges, development of a cultural competency model for addressing health care, and measuring the cost as a nation of not successfully caring for people with disabilities. The toolkit is posted on the ICDR website at this link: <https://icdr.acl.gov/system/files/resources/ICDR-Health%20Care%20Access-Qual-Toolkit.091021%20508.pdf>

### *Health Information Technology (IT) Toolkit: A Compendium of Accessible & Usable Health IT Resources*

The ICDR *Health Information Technology (IT)* *Toolkit* is designed to improve access to health IT for people with disabilities and older adults. The toolkit provides an overview of health IT and usability resources, research, and best practices across federal agencies, grantees, and non-federal organizations. Its purpose is to facilitate additional research and collaboration by federal agencies and departments on this topic and provide recommendations focusing on accessible and usable health IT. Recommended areas of future focus include improving individual access to usable health information and continuing to collect data about the changes in prevalence, burden, and impact of using these technologies, ensuring that users with disabilities, older adults, and caregivers are involved in health IT development and innovation. In addition, the toolkit advocates maintaining a focus on incorporating accessibility and usability during product development and increasing the proportion of doctors and hospitals with access to usable health IT. The toolkit is posted on the ICDR website at this link: <https://icdr.acl.gov/system/files/resources/ICDR-HIT%20Toolkit_508.pdf>

## **Employment for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities: Translating Evidence**

The ICDR hosted the Employment for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities virtual symposium on July 28, 2021. The symposium presented panels on vocational rehabilitation evidence and outcomes, early work experiences and future employment, postsecondary education and employment, federal efforts to improve employment outcomes, and employers and the future of work. A summary from the symposium, including panel summaries, questions and answers, and key takeaways, is posted on the ICDR website at this link: <https://icdr.acl.gov/system/files/resources/Employment%20Symposium%20Meeting%20Notes-final.docx>

## **Lunch and Learn Series**

In FY 2021, the ICDR launched a Lunch and Learn webinar series on topics related to disability and rehabilitation research to highlight the work of partners and member agencies. The first session featured a presentation by Dr. Jennifer Stevens-Lapsley on aging and mobility, *Getting Older is Not for the Weak; An Evidence-Based Approach to Improving Mobility*. The second session saw Dr. Susanne Bruyere present on the research being conducted by the Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University on workplace disability inclusion. The third session featured a presentation from Dr. Debra Brucker, the Institute on Disability, and Veronica Helms Garrison, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), titled *Using National Health Surveys to Better Understand HUD-Assisted Adults Living with Disabilities*.

## **Executive Committee Meetings**

The EC met virtually in December and March of FY 2021. At each of these meetings, members shared agency updates and information on upcoming initiatives, activities, and events. Working group chairs shared progress on implementing the strategic plan, including the continued development and launch of the GWI. The committee continued to work together to identify opportunities for future partnerships and collaboration. The latter half of FY 2021 focused on the planning and completion of the June 2021 stakeholder meeting, Lunch and Learn series, and toolkit development. [EC meeting summaries and any supplemental materials can be found on the EC page on the ICDR website.](https://icdr.acl.gov/committee/executive-committee)

## **Stakeholder Meeting**

The ICDR held a stakeholder meeting in June 2021 for members, senior NIDILRR leadership, affiliated researchers, and disability advocacy group representatives. Discussions included:

* An overview of the ICDR and the EC;
* Community integration and participation;
* Employment and education;
* Health, functioning, and wellness; and
* Assistive technology and universal design.

A summary report from the stakeholder meeting is posted on the ICDR website at this link: <https://icdr.acl.gov/system/files/resources/ICDR%20June%20Stakeholder%20Meeting%20Summary%20Report_Final_8-9-21_508.pdf>