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The Public Workforce System: Serving Older Job Seekers and the Disability Implications of an Aging Workforce

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Introduction

A confluence of demographic, economic, and health factors have intersected to make the employment situation of older Americans a matter of urgent national importance. Demographically, the U.S. labor force is aging. Economically, more and more workers are reaching traditional retirement age only to find that they cannot afford to retire and must keep working to make ends meet. And from a health standpoint, as people age they become more likely to acquire a disability or reduced functional capacity, which may affect their ability to remain in the workforce. The challenge for American policymakers and employers is how to enable an aging workforce to keep working in spite of the labor market, economic, and aging challenges older workers face.

Older workers are not a homogenous group. They span an array of ages, from “younger-older workers” who may be forty-something, to elderly seniors in their eighties. They may be defined differently depending on the industry in which they work. For example, some industries tend to view workers as old in their late forties (such as in construction). Employers may consider workers in this age group as being more at risk of physical limitations. On the other hand, in an industry such as information technology, supervisors may be concerned that someone in their early fifties is no longer capable of being on the cutting edge of advances in the field.

Thus, an extremely complex set of issues around the intersection of aging, disability, and employment exists. Individuals who have had a disability since birth or from a relatively young age who now are aging and need to manage secondary conditions that may be either a function of aging or a result of the progressive worsening of their primary disability comprise one segment of people who are aging. Having grown up with a disability, these individuals may already be well-acquainted with assistive technology, job accommodations, and the vocational rehabilitation system. They may also be familiar with the well-documented challenges facing many job seekers with disabilities regardless of their age. Another aging group are individuals who acquire a disability later in life, which could be related to aging, such as vision or hearing loss, or other physical issues that arise, or to an accident or the onset of illness or a chronic health condition. Other individuals may be coping with learning disabilities, changing intellectual abilities, or mental health issues that could be related to aging, from memory loss to depression. These last three groups may not identify themselves as having a “disability” and may have little or no knowledge of the resources that exist to help them gain or maintain employment.

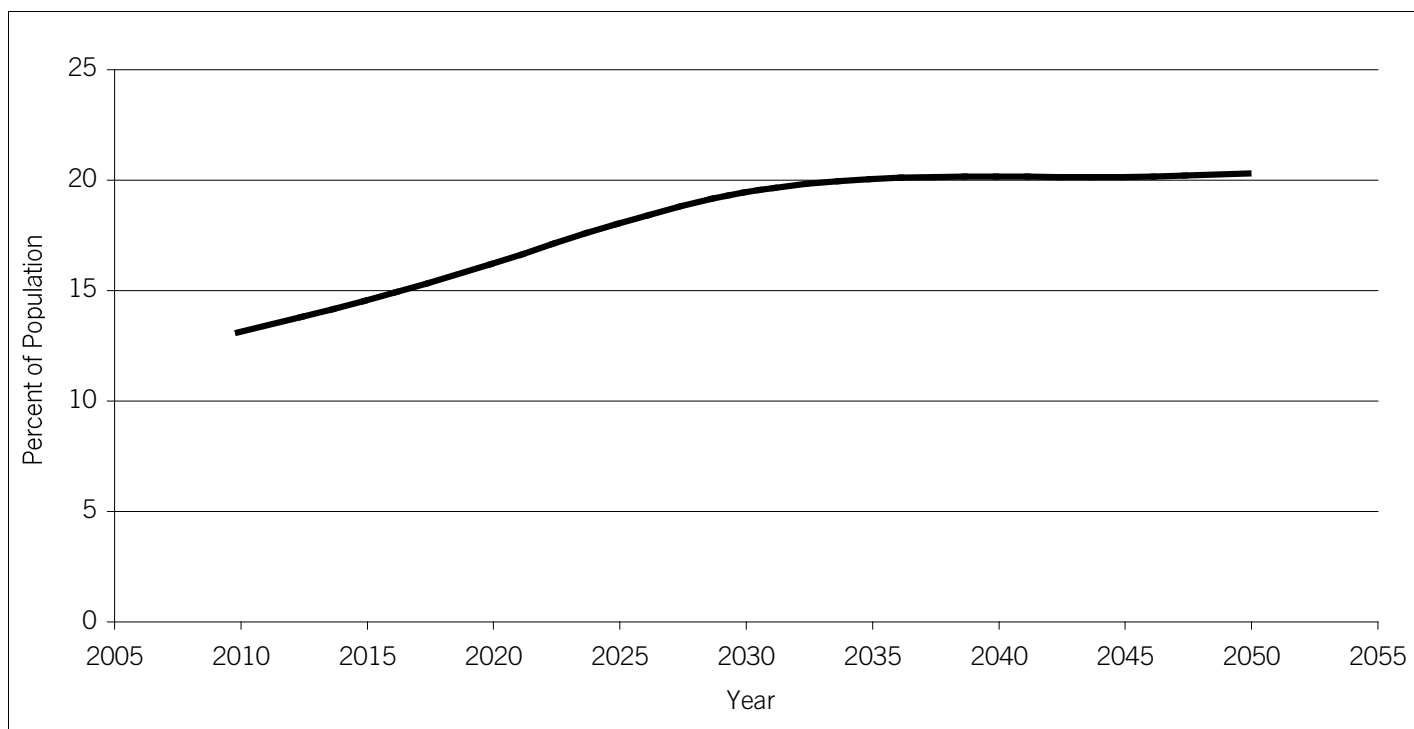
In short, teasing out the intertwined issues of how best to relate to and work with a job seeker who has multiple characteristics, including physical or mental impairments, is a challenge for the workforce system and was a challenge for this research. As such, the authors of this report choose to focus predominantly on older workers vis-à-vis the public workforce system as the unit of analysis, and where possible or where there is literature, discuss issues relating to disability in the context of age or being an older worker.

Subsequently, this report identifies the challenges that older workers face, describes how the U.S. public workforce system serves these individuals, and makes policy, program, and research recommendations aimed at improving the effectiveness of the U.S. *public workforce system* in serving this population. The report is structured as follows. Section one presents background research on older adults and employment, identifies the research questions, and describes the research methodology. Section two describes the challenges that older workers face in maintaining employment or in becoming reemployed after losing a job. Section three defines and describes the current U.S. public workforce system and how it serves older workers.¹ Section four presents a summary of promising practices that have been identified by national experts and practitioners in the field and that national, state, and local public and nonprofit agencies and organizations have adopted to assist older workers in finding and keeping a job. Finally, section five presents policy, program, and research recommendations drawing upon interviews with national experts, including federal, state, and local workforce policymakers and practitioners.

Background

The U.S. population and workforce are aging. Demographic projections show that over the coming decades, the U.S. population will consist of a much greater percentage of older adults than it does today. U.S. Census (2008) projections show that whereas 13 percent of the U.S. population in 2010 was age 65 or older, by the year 2030 that percentage will have risen to 19.3 percent. Figure 1 charts the projected growth in the U.S. population age 65 and older over the next 40 years.

Figure 1. Percent of U.S. Population Age 65 and Older, 2010 to 2050 (Projected)



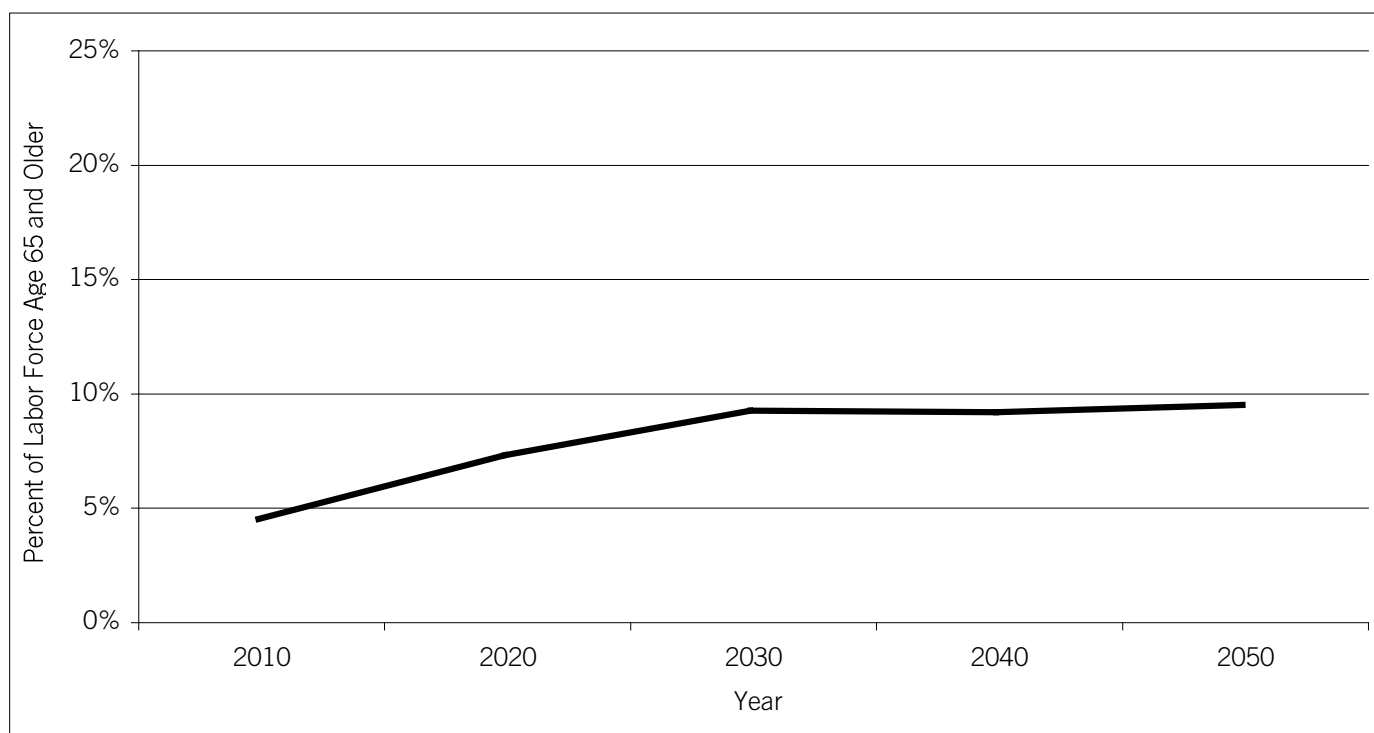
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (2008)

As the population ages, so does the workforce. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011) projects that whereas about seven million people 65 or older are in the labor force today, by the year 2050 that number will have almost tripled to 19.6 million. Older workers will comprise a greater percentage of the workforce in the future than they do today. Figure 2 shows the projected share of adults 65 and older in the labor force between 2010 and 2050.

Not only are a greater number of older workers likely to be in the labor force in the future, they are likely to participate in the labor force at a much higher rate than younger individuals. For example, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011) projects that over the next 10 years, the number of individuals in the labor force who are at least 65 years old will grow by 75 percent, while the number of workers ages 25 to 54 will grow by only 2 percent. Figure 3 shows the growth rate of the U.S. labor force by age group over the next 40 years.

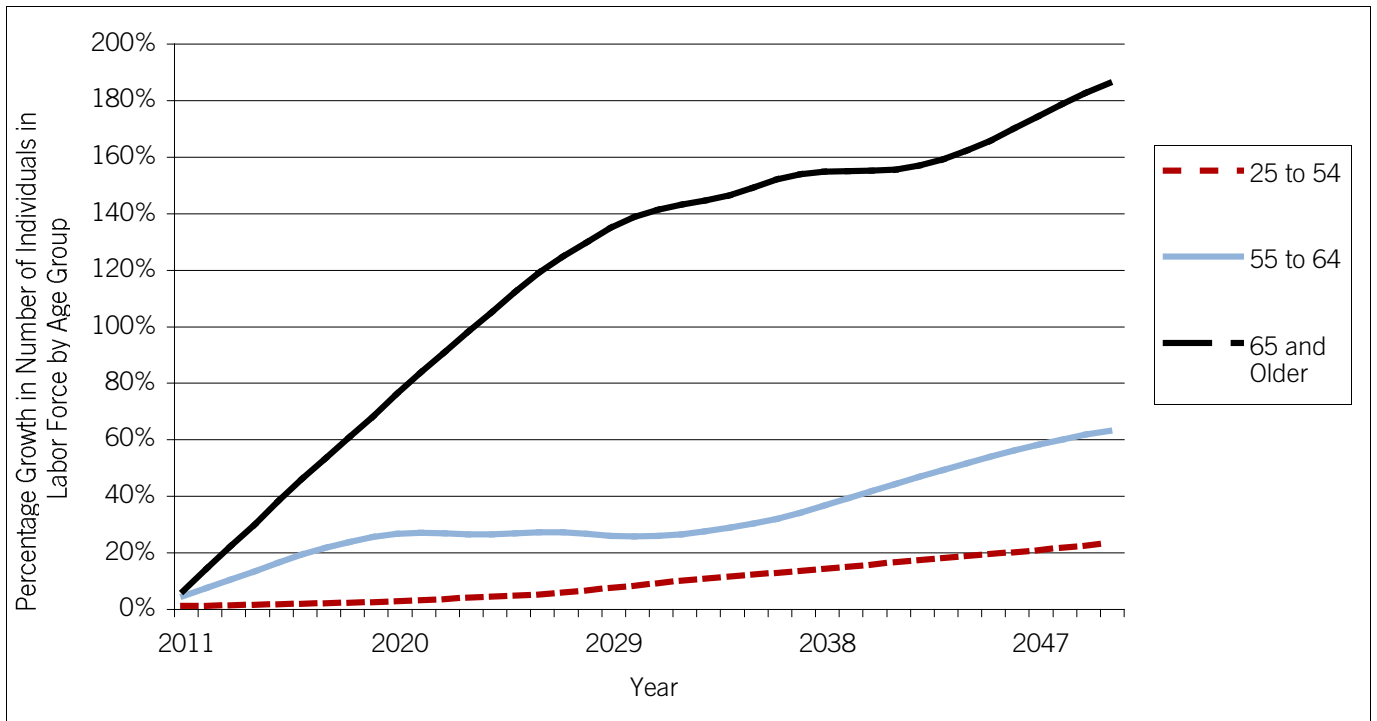
While the general population consists of a greater number of older adults than in the past, a greater percentage of older adults participating in the labor force than ever before also is evident. As shown in Figure 4, the percentage of the population age 65 and older that is in the labor force will grow over the next 10 years from about 17 percent to 22 percent. Beginning in 2020, this percentage will level off and hold at roughly 22 percent of the labor force through 2050.

Figure 2. Percent of U.S. Labor Force Age 65 and Older, 2010 to 2050 (Projected)



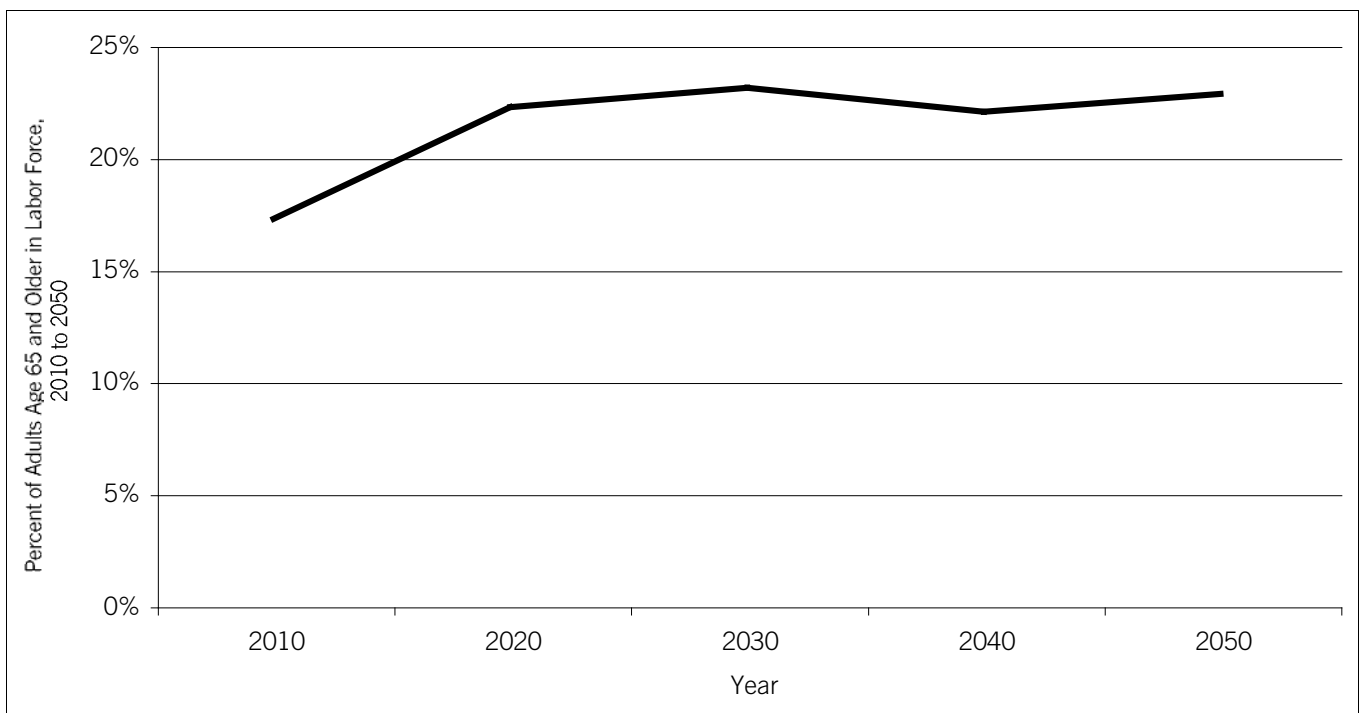
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010)

Figure 3. Percentage Growth in Number of Individuals in the Labor Force, by Age, 2011 to 2050 (Projected)



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010)

Figure 4. Percentage of Adult Population Age 65 and Older in the Labor Force, 2010 to 2050



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010)

The Great Recession had a significant economic impact on the income, assets, and overall financial security of many Americans, including older adults who were closer to retirement. Based on an October 2010 survey conducted by AARP of more than 5,000 Americans over 50 who were in the labor force at some point in the previous three years, Rix (2011) found that more than half (52.6 percent) of those surveyed were not confident that they would have enough money to live comfortably in retirement. One in four reported that they had exhausted their savings during the Great Recession. Roughly two-thirds (67 percent) filed for Social Security benefits earlier than they had planned. One-third (31.6 percent) saw their homes decline substantially in value. Adding to these economic woes, one in eight lost their health insurance. A clear byproduct of these economic losses is that more Americans are highly likely to delay retirement and stay in the workforce longer. The AARP survey found that a third of older adults said that as a result of the economic effects of the Great Recession, they had decided to delay retirement (Rix, 2011).

As workers age, they are more likely to acquire a disability, which may affect their decision on when to retire. In their analyses of Current Population Survey (CPS) and American Community Survey (ACS) data, Burkhauser, Daly, and Tennant (2010) found that the prevalence of a disability increases significantly with age, as does the prevalence specifically of a work-limiting disability. Hwang (2010) used data from the Health and Retirement Survey (HRS) of Americans and followed for two years individuals who were 50 or older, were working full time, and reported not having a disability in their baseline interview. Hwang (2010) found that two years later, 10.1 percent of these workers reported having acquired a disability that limited their ability to work.

Research Methodology

This report addresses a number of key issues raised by the aging of the American workforce that affect the policies, practices, and services delivered to older workers by the U.S. public workforce system. It reviews the extent to which the public workforce system currently serves older job seekers, identifies promising practices that various workforce stakeholders have developed to help older adults stay employed and/or return to work, and offers recommendations for improving publicly financed workforce services for older workers. In conducting this study, the research focused on answering the following questions:

1. What challenges do older workers face in the U.S. labor market?
2. How is the U.S. public workforce system currently serving older job seekers?
3. What are some promising practices being developed or being delivered by national, state, and local public and private workforce agencies to serve the older worker?
4. How can the public workforce system improve its ability to serve older workers and older workers with a disability?

Three primary research strategies were used to develop this report. First, an exhaustive review of existing literature was conducted. This review encompassed a description of the target population, labor market participation among older Americans, and the role of the public workforce system in serving the older worker (and where available, research on older workers aging with a disability seeking public workforce services), including pilot programs, outcome information, and recommendations for areas of further study.

Second, telephone and in-person interviews were conducted with 45 key informants, predominantly nationally recognized experts in aging, workforce development, and disability employment. Interviews were conducted between March 2011 and May 2011. Questions focused on challenges in serving older workers and older workers with disabilities; promising practices or pilot projects under way to improve services; and short- and long-term recommendations to improve public policy, areas for further research, and enhanced training or technical assistance to the workforce field.

Additionally, state and local workforce professionals were asked to identify collaborations with other stakeholders that have proved successful (or unsuccessful) in their efforts to develop better employment and training services to older workers or older workers with disabilities. They were also asked the type of approach used by their organization when serving customers. Specifically, do they employ a universal approach, where they serve all customers regardless of age or disability, or do they routinely refer the older job seeker to programs that specialize in serving older workers, such as the Senior Community Service Employment Program, or an individual with a disability to vocational rehabilitation? Also examined in the expanded interviews were any policies or procedures that are used by program operators and frontline staff to support the development and implementation of better employment services for older adults. And, whether they had any resources specifically dedicated to serving older workers. (For a list of the agencies and organizations that participated in the interviews and the interview protocols, please see Appendix A.)

Finally, in partnership with the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA), an extensive outreach of individuals working in the state and local workforce system was conducted. The Heldrich Center, NASWA, and NAWB received 586 responses from individuals representing a cross section of stakeholders. (See Appendix A for details on respondents.)

Labor Market and Workplace Challenges Facing Older Job Seekers

Recent Labor Market Experience of Older Job Seekers

At 6.2 percent in March 2012, the unemployment rate of older workers is lower than the national average of 8.2 percent for all workers. It has been assumed that older workers are generally less likely to lose their jobs than younger workers because their longer tenure on the job provides them with some protection. A 2006 study conducted for the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College found that the lower probability of job loss for older workers was based on the correlation between tenure and age, but that controlling for tenure, age does not protect workers from displacement; the probability of displacement actually increases with age (Munnell, Sass, Soto, & Zhivan, 2006). Similarly, when Johnson and Mommaerts (2011) controlled for the length of time on the job, they found that men between the ages of 50 and 61 were more likely to lose their jobs than men aged 25 to 34. And, as Johnson and Mommaerts note, “As long-term employment relationships become less common at older ages, the existing layoff advantage for older workers may erode further.”

Considerable evidence also shows that older workers who lose a job have a more difficult time than their younger counterparts in reconnecting to the labor market. According to one study, only half of older workers who lost their jobs and sought to return to work were able to find a new job (Maestas & Li, 2006; Li, 2010). Johnson and Park (2011) found that older workers (ages 50 to 61) who lost their jobs between mid-2008 and 2009 were a third less likely to find work within 12 months when compared with those age 25 to 34, and those 62 or older were half as likely to find work within 12 months.

The employment rates of older displaced workers also compare unfavorably with their non-displaced older peers. Results from a 2001 report found that two years after losing a job at 55 years of age, only 60 percent of men and 55 percent of women were employed, compared to 80 percent employment rates for their same-age peers who had not been displaced (Chan & Stevens, 2001). Even four years after the job loss, the different employment rates for older displaced workers and their non-displaced same-age peers persisted.

In addition, there is some evidence that the employment rates of older dislocated workers with disabilities are lower than those of younger dislocated workers with disabilities. The Heldrich Center’s study of Unemployment Insurance reciprocity among workers with disabilities in Washington State found that adults older than 50 with disabilities who exited the WIA Dislocated Worker program had lower employment rates than adults with disabilities between the ages of 41 and 50 who exited the WIA Dislocated Worker program. However, the employment rates of the oldest cohort of WIA Dislocated Worker program exiters with disabilities in Washington State (i.e., 51 and older) were roughly similar to those of their counterparts who were 40 and younger (Hollenbeck, 2012).

Confirming the poor outcomes for older job seekers, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in its study of displaced workers from the 2007 to 2009 time period, found that in January 2010, the reemployment rate for older displaced workers ages 55 to 64 was only 39 percent, and that for those job seekers 65 and over, the rate was an even lower 22 percent. By contrast, the reemployment rates for younger workers were considerably higher: workers ages 20 to 24 had a reemployment rate of 55 percent, and workers age 25 to 54 had a reemployment rate of 53 percent (BLS, 2010). (See Table 1.)

Based on the Heldrich Center’s Work Trends national surveys conducted between the summer of 2009 and the end of 2010, older workers had the lowest reemployment rate of any other demographic group the study considered (see Table 2) (Van Horn, Corre, & Heidkamp, 2011).

Table 1. Long-tenured Displaced Workers by Age and Employment Status in January 2010

Age	Total (thousands)	Total	Employed	Unemployed	Not in Labor Force
Total	6,938	100%	48.8%	36.1%	15.2%
20 to 24	227	100%	54.8%	29.8%	15.4%
25 to 54	4,923	100%	53.4%	35.6%	11.0%
55 to 64	1,395	100%	38.7%	39.9%	21.4%
65 and Older	392	100%	22.5%	32.4%	45.1%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010)

Table 2. Reemployment Rates for Demographic Groups: August 2009 through November 2010 (n=764)

Workers 55 and older	15%
Workers 18 to 34	41%
Workers 35 to 54	32%
High school education or less	33%
Some college	28%
Bachelor's degree or higher	43%
Black, non-Hispanic/Other, Hispanic	29%
Income less than \$30K	27%
Income \$30K to \$60K	29%
Income more than \$60K	56%

Source: John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development

A June 2011 study released by Boston University's Center for Labor Market Studies also found older workers who were displaced from their jobs during the Great Recession faring poorly (Sum & Trubskyy, 2011). When the authors controlled for gender, race/ethnicity, age, educational attainment, occupation, industry, economic sector, and state unemployment, older workers had a significantly higher probability of being unemployed than younger workers, and those 65 and older had the highest chance of being unemployed of all age groups studied.

Duration of Unemployment

Once they lose a job, older workers face a longer stretch of unemployment on average than younger workers. In March 2012, the average period of unemployment for older job seekers (55 and up) was 55.7 weeks, compared to 37.3 weeks for younger job seekers (Rix, 2012). Not surprisingly given the duration of unemployment, a larger share of reemployed older job losers compared to younger, prime-age job losers exhaust their Unemployment Insurance before finding another job (Levine, 2010).

Long-term unemployment has risen for all age cohorts since the Great Recession began in December 2007, but older job seekers present the highest rates of long-term unemployment. As of March 2012, over half of older job seekers (53.3 percent) qualify as long-term unemployed, a threshold officially defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as 27 or more weeks out of work. For those job seekers who are under 55, the comparable figure is 39.5 percent. Given that it has been documented in both labor economics and in research on vocational rehabilitation that long durations of unemployment "bode poorly for eventual return-to-work" (Fogg, Harrington, & McMahon, 2010), the long stretches of unemployment for older job seekers are a reason for serious concern. A number of the public workforce officials interviewed for this study reported the deleterious effect long-term unemployment was having on the mental health as well as job readiness of older job seekers. One local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) director explained that long-term unemployment results in a "debilitating syndrome" that makes individuals nearly unemployable, particularly for those who have been unemployed longer than 99 weeks, and that before the workforce system can think about helping

these individuals refine old skills or acquire new ones, their mental health needs must be addressed. Prolonged unemployment and the accompanying personal, financial, and other stresses can cause the job seekers' self-esteem and confidence to deteriorate to a point where they can become insurmountable barriers to new employment. In this particular WIB region, over half of the very long-term unemployed are more than 50 years old.²

Declining Wages

For those older workers who do succeed in finding new jobs, many must accept steep cuts in pay. Johnson and Mommaerts (2011) found that for displaced men age 50 to 61 who became reemployed between 1996 and 2007, the median hourly wage fell 20 percent compared to the previous job. For those men over 62, the median wage for the new job was 36 percent lower than for the old job. However, men age 35 to 49 only suffered a 4 percent loss in median wages of the new job compared to the old, and men 25 to 34 lost even less ground, with a 2 percent drop in median wages. Data from Heldrich Center Work Trends surveys also revealed that of the one in six older workers who had found another job, half were forced to take pay cuts, in many cases quite substantial ones. Fourteen percent of respondents said the income from their new jobs was more than 50 percent less than what they had earned in their previous job (Van Horn, Corre, & Heidkamp, 2011).

Demand- and Supply-Side Challenges to the Hiring and Retention of Older Workers

The reemployment experience of older job seekers in the United States can be attributed to a range of challenges that impede their ability to reconnect to the labor market. These challenges occur both on the demand side, where there is evidence documenting employer reluctance to hire older workers, and on the supply side, where the skills, qualifications, health, and disability status, and other characteristics of older workers affect their labor market success.

Demand-Side Challenges

Paramount among the many obstacles that older job seekers seem to be encountering at the workplace is the reluctance of employers to hire them. At a December 5, 2006 Government Accountability Office (GAO) forum for older workers, employers listed numerous negative perceptions of older workers that affect their willingness to hire and retain them, including:

1. Older workers are more expensive, including their wages, health insurance, and the cost to train them.
2. Older workers are less productive than younger workers and deliver lower-quality work.
3. Older workers are less flexible about adapting to change in the workplace (Walker, 2007).

Employers at the GAO forum also noted their concern of risking age discrimination lawsuits if they need to lay off a recently hired older employee (Walker, 2007). Other employer concerns and stereotypes that have been cited in the past include: older workers lack energy, may have obsolete skills and knowledge, have shorter career potential, and block the career paths of younger workers (Rhine, 1984). Many of these concerns have been addressed by various research reports, including AARP's *The Business Case for Workers Age 50+* (Feinsod,

Davenport, & Arthurs, 2005), which emphasizes the positive traits of older workers, such as “experience, loyalty, attention to task, perseverance, work habits and emotional maturity.” Other studies have found that older workers may take longer to master new skills but can in fact master them, including computer and technology skills (Charness & Czaja, 2006). Studies have also found that while individual older workers’ health care costs may rise with age, these costs are offset by the lower costs due to fewer dependents (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, n.d.). Nevertheless, the negative perceptions seem to linger.

Several studies have found that there is some reluctance among employers to either retain or hire aging workers. Examining data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Older Men, Johnson and Neumark (1997) found a “large and significant” relationship between self-reports by workers of employer age discrimination and the probability that the individual was separated from his job. Bendick, Jackson, and Romero (1997) mailed pairs of résumés with the same qualifications — one for a 32-year-old and one for a 57-year-old — to 775 companies and employment agencies. The résumé for the younger worker received a positive response from employers 26.5 percent more often than did the résumé for the older worker. Based on sending out 4,000 résumés for job applicants with different ages, Lahey (2005) found that workers under 50 years of age were 42 percent more likely to be called for a job interview than those 50 and older.

According to the Congressional Research Service, the lower employment rate of older displaced workers compared to both prime-age workers and non-displaced older worker seems to be a function of “restricted opportunities” older job seekers confront, rather than factors such as a greater preference for leisure or more non-labor income (Levine, 2010). Another study looked at a range of factors that might influence older job seekers’ decisions about employment, including having a high “reservation wage” — the lowest wage rate at which a worker will accept a job. The researchers concluded that roughly half of the older job seekers who failed to find new employment, 13 percent could be described as “discouraged workers” — willing to work at the prevailing wage but simply unable to find a job (Maestas & Li, 2006). In other words, while it is sometimes supposed that older workers are unwilling to accept employment at lower wages, this study found no evidence that older job seekers held reservations wages that are so high that they would preclude them from finding a job.

Other demand-side factors relate to the current labor market more broadly. The Great Recession had caused firms to engage in mass layoffs and reduced the willingness of firms to hire new workers, substantially reducing the demand for workers of any age. The needs of incumbent older workers to work longer also reduced the demand for labor as fewer workers were leaving their jobs for retirement.

Supply-Side Challenges

Beyond employer reluctance and a sluggish labor market potentially affecting the demand for older workers, older job seekers face a range of supply-side barriers to their reemployment. Among these obstacles are skill limitations combined with limited access to training programs, limited job search skills, and health- and disability-related challenges that often accompany aging.

SKILL LIMITATIONS AND ACCESS TO TRAINING PROGRAMS

Previous research has found that many older job seekers have skill limitations that make it difficult for them to return to work. In their study of workforce programs in Kentucky that serve workers 55 and older, Graycarek and Thomas (2010) asked more than two dozen workforce staff their opinion on the needs of older workers

who use the workforce system. Staff reported that older workers lack technical skills, have outdated skills, are less educated, and therefore remain unemployed longer than their younger counterparts. Many of the public workforce system experts interviewed for this report cited similar concerns, especially when talking about older dislocated workers whose jobs have permanently disappeared, leaving them in need of training to help them transition to a new occupation or industry.

The lack of technology skills came up repeatedly in the literature and in interviews as a particular hindrance for many older job seekers. Levine (2010) cited research that found that the high demand for computer skills is one of the factors that is positively correlated with older job seekers' limited access to employment.

Other research has found that dislocated older workers, particularly those who had been in physically demanding or low-skill jobs, face challenges due to low literacy levels that impede their ability to undertake the retraining they now need to transition to new employment (Heidkamp & Mabe, 2011). A review of Michigan's No Worker Left Behind program, which offered up to \$10,000 over two years for unemployed and underemployed workers to attend programs that offered postsecondary credentials, found that one in three working-age Michigan residents lacked the basic skills necessary to participate successfully in community college (Good, 2011).

Although older workers may need training at least as much if not more than their younger counterparts, they have less access to both employer-sponsored and publicly funded training programs than younger workers. Employers may be reluctant to make investments in training older workers out of concern that they may not recoup their training costs before older employees retire (Eyster, Johnson, & Toder, 2008). The Report of the U.S. Department of Labor's Taskforce on the Aging of the American Workforce (2008) cited a study that showed the hours of employer-provided training received declined with age, with employees over 55 participating in 9 hours of training per year, compared to 37 hours for employees between the ages of 25 and 34. Other research has raised questions about the "trainability" of older workers, noting that many cognitive abilities decline with age and that seniors are in general slower to acquire new skills than younger adults (Zhang, 2011). The Taskforce's report also noted that, in addition to employer reluctance to train older employees, some of the discrepancy may be due to older workers themselves being afraid of pursuing training, either because they fear their managers will not support them or they doubt their own abilities. Public workforce system experts interviewed for this report offered several explanations for why older workers are reluctant to go to training: they tend to be uncomfortable with having to start over or feel uncomfortable taking training classes with younger students who may be more technologically adept or able to learn the material more quickly. And, older workers may have vision or hearing problems, or literary and learning disabilities, that may make it more difficult for them to learn in a training course.

Older clients of the public workforce investment system also seem to have less access to training than younger job seekers. According to the Report of the Taskforce on the Aging of the American Workforce (2008), several factors could contribute to this outcome, including reluctance of older workers to use the system, as well as the tendency of some One-Stop Career Centers to refer older workers to the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) instead of serving them under federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Adult and Dislocated Worker programs. GAO (2003), as well as many practitioners interviewed for this report, also cited the disincentives to serving older job seekers that result from federally mandated WIA performance measures. For example, if an older worker accepts a new job that pays substantially less than his or her previous job, the provider's performance measures that track changes in earnings are negatively affected. The U.S. Department of Labor has recently piloted a statistical model for use in setting performance targets for WIA programs that should help remove the disincentives for serving older participants. It was implemented across

the nation for setting Program Year 2011 performance targets.³ According to ETA, states undergo performance negotiations with their regional offices to determine the performance goals associated with their outcome measures. The regression targets utilize factors such as disproportionate amounts of hard-to-serve populations (including older or aging workers), economic conditions, and prior year actual performance numbers to produce a target for that state's upcoming performance goals. This is used as a tool with which the regional offices can begin the negotiation process for performance goals with each state.

Debates continue over the effectiveness of retraining programs for job seekers of all ages (Engemann, 2009), with several studies demonstrating mixed results. A recent study published by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA), however, has found that certain types of mostly job-specific training services — On-the-Job Training (OJT), Skill Upgrading and Retraining, and Customized Training — have a positive effect on the entered employment rates of older dislocated workers (Zhang, 2011). Zhang also found that Entrepreneurial Training and Adult Basic Education (ABE) or English as a Second Language (ESL) in combination with training did not have a statistically significant effect on the entered employment rate compared to other occupational training.

LIMITED JOB SEARCH SKILLS

Not only do older workers have job skills deficiencies relative to younger workers, they also have weaker job search skills than younger workers (Abraham & Houseman, 2008). Older dislocated workers especially have little experience in searching for employment and may therefore have difficulty in finding a job — a process that with the advent of the Internet and social networking has become more technologically oriented. According to the Report of the Task Force on the Aging of the American Workforce (2008), some older job seekers lack both the skills to search for jobs and the self-confidence to market their strengths to employers. Older job seekers who worked for an employer for a long time or those who had retired but are returning to work are likely to lack job-hunting techniques (Zhang, 2011).

A University of Michigan Retirement Research Center study (Maestas & Li, 2006) found that only half of older job seekers were successful at attaining employment, and that one of the possible reasons for the low employment outcomes was related to "job search intensity." The researchers found a clear correlation between job search strategy and intensity and attainment of a job. They found that older job seekers who achieved successful outcomes were more likely to use a direct contact strategy (including contacting employers or reading/placing/answering ads) and to search for the same kind of job as before. They also found an association between job attainment and the total number of strategies used, which was how they measured intensity of job search. They concluded that those who did not get a job seemed to have been less effective job searchers, noting that the unsuccessful group also included some older job seekers who were trying to change industries or occupations, where they were likely to be less competitive candidates.

HEALTH- AND DISABILITY-RELATED CHALLENGES

A significant supply-side challenge that affects older workers' ability to work is their health. In *Growing Older in America: The Health and Retirement Study* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], n.d.), 35 percent of respondents age 55 to 59 cited poor health as being very important in their decision to retire. Poor health has been found to be a reason for involuntary job loss as well (Salm, 2009).

Given the widespread use of advanced technologies and the changing labor market in the United States, jobs on the whole have become less physically demanding, which should be an advantage for older workers, including those with disabilities or chronic health conditions. However, workers who reported their health to be fair to poor were more likely to be in a job that required physical demands (Johnson, Mermin, & Ressegir, 2007). Another study (Rho, 2010) found that in 2009, of the 18.7 million workers age 58 and older, roughly 35 percent were in physically demanding jobs, of which about 5 percent required “high physical demand.” Further, more than a quarter of workers age 58 and older were exposed to “difficult work conditions,” and nearly half of workers over 70 years old, the largest share for any age group, were employed in “physically or environmentally uncomfortable or unsafe occupations.”

One challenge highlighted by several workforce system experts is that many older workers who acquire a disability do not consider themselves as having a disability. Rather, they simply see themselves as aging. Several interviewees noted that older workers are unlikely to seek accommodations from their employers that might help them to stay on the job longer, and they are also less likely to seek services from the public workforce and vocational rehabilitation systems that might help them stay on the job or return to work.

In sum, evidence demonstrates that older job seekers have experienced poor employment outcomes compared to younger job seekers, significantly longer durations of unemployment, and steep declines in wages for those who do find reemployment. They face a plethora of real and perceived challenges that may be contributing to these outcomes, including weak demand from employers and possible age discrimination, outdated skills such as increasingly important technology skills, limited access to both employer-sponsored and publicly supported training, and an increase in health and disability issues associated with aging.

The U.S. Public Workforce System

The U.S. workforce system is an amalgamation of federal and state-funded employment and training programs largely administered at the federal level by the U.S. Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2011), the federal public workforce system is comprised of more than 47 programs administered by nine federal agencies, yet the heart of the public workforce development system and 80 percent of the budget resources are handled by the 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and its system of One-Stop Career Centers and the Unemployment Insurance system.

WIA programs are operated through One-Stop Career Centers and include the Workforce Investment Act Adult and Dislocated Worker Program, the Wagner-Peyser program, and programs targeted at specific populations (veterans, youth, Native Americans, migrant workers, and people with disabilities). WIA is seen as the primary funding stream for programs to serve all job seekers and, as such, funds a set of universal programs that are, in theory, designed to offer services to all job seekers.⁴ The public workforce system also includes the nation’s community colleges that train the workforce through degree and credential — “credit” — programs and “non-credit” programs that help job seekers and incumbent workers learn basic and/or occupational skills.

Today, the public workforce system includes just two programs that specifically target all of their resources at older workers: the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) and the Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance (ATAA) program (GAO, 2008).⁵ (See Table 3.) Authorized by Title V of the Older Americans Act, SCSEP provides subsidized employment opportunities to low-income older workers (55 and older) earning less than 125 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. With 74 grantees throughout the nation,

Table 3. Targeted Workforce Programs for Older Workers

Program	Eligibility Requirements	Key Services	Origin and Reach
<p>Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)</p>	<p>Based on age, income, and employment status</p> <p>Must be 55 years or older</p> <p>Have income that is no more than 125% of the federal poverty level</p> <p>Be unemployed</p>	<p>Assessment and Individual Employment Plans</p> <p>Part-time, paid job training in a nonprofit organization or government agency</p> <p>Necessary support services</p> <p>Unsubsidized job placement wherever feasible</p>	<p>Established under Title V of the Older Americans Act, as amended and currently administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration</p> <p>Available in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and 4 U.S. territories</p> <p>Funded through grants to the states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and territories, and 18 competitively selected national nonprofit organizations</p>
<p>Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance (ATAA)</p>	<p>Similar to the Trade Adjustment Assistance criteria whereby workers must demonstrate that foreign trade has adversely affected them, except specifically designed for workers aged 50 and older. Workers who are certified as eligible may apply for both TAA and ATAA but may only be enrolled in one or the other.</p>	<p>Rapid Response Services: Government personnel provide on-site reemployment services to newly laid-off employees.</p> <p>Reemployment Services: Offer workers assistance in finding new jobs. Workers who wish to qualify for benefits under the program may be able to quickly return to work through a combination of services provided through a One-Stop Career Center.</p> <p>Wage Subsidy: Eligible workers aged 50 or older who obtain new, full-time employment at wages of less than \$50,000 within 26 weeks of their separation may receive a wage subsidy of 50% of the difference between the old wages and new wages, up to \$10,000 paid over a period of up to two years.</p> <p>Health Coverage Tax Credit: Workers who are receiving the wage subsidy under ATAA may be eligible to receive tax credits for 65 percent of the monthly health insurance premiums they pay.</p>	<p>Established through the Trade Assistance Reform Act of 2002 and is administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. States serve as agents to the Labor Department in administering the program.</p>

Source: U.S. Department of Labor

SCSEP served more than 105,000 participants in Program Year (PY) 2010, the most recent year for which data are available. The PY 2010 annual goal of the program was to place 46.5 percent of its exiting participants in unsubsidized employment; 47 percent of exiting participants nationwide were actually placed in unsubsidized employment (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). GAO (2008) estimates that SCSEP serves 1 percent of the eligible population. Table 4 shows the appropriations for SCSEP between 2000 and 2010 and the number of individuals that the program served during that period.

Table 4. SCSEP Participants Served, 2000 to 2010

Program Year	Appropriation	Number of Participants
2000	\$440,200,000	105,840
2001	\$440,200,000	107,237
2002	\$445,100,000	110,085
2003	\$443,806,200	101,353
2004	\$440,649,607	92,149
2005	\$438,678,400	93,506
2006*	\$432,311,220	68,223
2007	\$480,447,848	90,340
2008	\$516,625,177	89,324
2009	\$571,925,000	103,324
2010	\$825,425,000	105,940

*Incomplete data due to disruption caused by the national grantee competition.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, data provided through email correspondence, June 23, 2011

The federal Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program provides job search assistance and training to dislocated workers who have lost their jobs as a result of foreign competition. In 2002, the Trade Act wrote in a five-year demonstration known as the Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance Act (ATAA) that exclusively targeted older workers (age 50 or older) who had been displaced by foreign trade. ATAA provided a wage subsidy of up to \$10,000 annually to older workers who agreed to forgo TAA-funded training and who found a job in 26 weeks or less at a wage that is less than what they earned in their previous job (and less than \$50,000 annually). Take-up into the program was very low, due to low awareness, reluctance among eligible applicants to forgo the possibility of training, and difficulty in finding a job in the 26-week time period allotted (Van Horn, Krepcio, & Ridley, 2006). Between May 2009 and spring 2011, ATAA was known as the Reemployment Trade Adjustment Assistance (RTAA) program, which included several changes to the original provisions, such as being available to workers who earned up to \$55,000 on their new jobs. In Fiscal Year 2011, the latest year for which data are available, only 6,204 individuals participated in ATAA and RTAA (USDOL/ETA, n.d.). However, the program has since reverted to the 2002 ATAA provisions.

In addition, the public workforce system provides targeted services to individuals with disabilities through the Vocational Rehabilitation program, which is Title IV of the WIA, but is also mandated to serve all workers regardless of age and disability through its Adult and Dislocated Worker programs as well. The mission of the Vocational Rehabilitation system is to help people with disabilities maintain employment and prepare for and return to work. Although aging increases the probability of acquiring a disability, the vast majority of the individuals that Vocational Rehabilitation agencies serve are under the age of 60. (See Table 5.) It is worth noting that percent of those served by the Vocational Rehabilitation system who are 60 and older has risen from 2.0% in 2000 to 6.1% in 2008.

Table 5. Number and Percentage of Adults 60 and Older Served by the Vocational Rehabilitation System, 2000 to 2008

Year	16 to 59	60 and Older	Percent 60 and Older
2000	207,865	4,172	2.0%
2001	205,374	4,917	2.3%
2002	197,544	8,024	3.9%
2003	195,776	8,653	4.2%
2004	195,518	6,471	3.2%
2005	190,170	7,116	3.6%
2006	167,230	8,593	4.9%
2007	185,060	10,026	5.1%
2008	184,247	12,064	6.1%

Source: Institute for Community Inclusion

As the primary public workforce program and funding source, WIA serves job seekers of all ages. Since 2006, the number of adults served by WIA has risen dramatically. In PY 2010, WIA served over 200,000 adults 55 or older or 12.7 percent of individuals served. Table 6 displays the number of persons receiving WIA services by age group from 2006 to 2010.⁶ As of the first quarter of 2011, two million adults age 55 and older were unemployed (BLS, 2011).

Whereas the precursor to WIA, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), included a set-aside for serving older workers, WIA eliminated that set-aside and includes no requirements to serve older workers. In interviews with One-Stop personnel, GAO (2003) found that ending the 204(d) older worker set-aside reduced the number of programs that One-Stops offered targeting older workers.

Table 6. Number of Individuals Exiting WIA Services, 2006 to 2010⁷

Age Grouping	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
18 to 54	720,923	934,778	1,033,265	1,399,200	1,514,128
55 and Older	81,829	121,419	138,536	201,406	219,448
Percent of WIA Participants Who are 55 and Older	10.2%	11.5%	11.8%	12.6%	12.7%

Sources: WIASRD Data Books, PY 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010, <http://www.doleta.gov/performance/results/Reports.cfm?#wiasrd>

Are One-Stops less likely to serve older workers than they are to serve younger workers? WIA program data (WIASRD)⁸ were examined to assess at what rate One-Stops were serving older workers versus younger workers. Among the five WIA age categories — 18 to 21, 22 to 29, 30 to 44, 45 to 54, and 55 and older — adults age 55 and older make up the smallest percentage of adults served by WIA in all categories of service (core, intensive, and training).

To accurately gauge whether older adults are being served at a different rate than younger adults, the number of older adults served relative to a meaningful benchmark was examined, such as the number of older adults who are unemployed, and then compared to the number of younger adults served relative to the number of younger adults who are unemployed.⁹ The question is: what percentage of older adults who are unemployed receive WIA services and what percentage of younger adults who are unemployed receive WIA services?

Using this measure, the One-Stops slightly underserve older workers relative to younger workers. Whereas 13.6 percent of adults aged 18 to 54 who were unemployed in 2010 received WIA services, 11.1 percent of unemployed adults age 55 or older received WIA services. (See Table 7.) This gap hovered around 2 percent from 2006 through 2010. The difference, though small, is statistically significant at 99 percent, meaning that One-Stops systematically serve older workers at a somewhat lower rate than they serve younger workers.

More important, older workers are likely to be served differently by the One-Stops. A look at the WIA performance data reveals that older workers in WIA-funded programs are less likely to receive training than younger individuals who access WIA services. While older job seekers represent 11.9 percent of all WIA adult exiters, they account for only 7.1 percent of training recipients. Table 8 breaks down the types of services WIA exiters received by age group from April 2010 through March 2011.

Since 2006, job seekers 55 and older have accessed training at a consistently lower rate than younger job seekers. Table 9 displays the percentage of job seekers who received training by age group.

Community colleges and other postsecondary educational institutions are playing an increasingly important role in workforce development. Yet just as older workers in the WIA system are less likely to participate in training than younger workers, they are also less likely to enroll in credential or degree-granting programs at two- and four-year colleges. Tables 10 and 11 show that adults over the age of 50 participate at a low rate in degree-granting programs at both two- and four-year colleges and universities.

Table 7. Percent of Unemployed Adults Who Exited WIA Services (All Categories), by Age Group, April 2010 through March 2011

Age Grouping	Number WIA Exiters	Number Unemployed (March 2011)	Percent of Unemployed who Exited WIA Services
18 to 54	1,514,128	11,115,000	13.6%
55 and Older	219,448	1,977,000	11.1%

Source: Source: PY 2010 WIASRD Data Book, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release.empsit.t10.htm>

Note: “Unemployed” includes only individuals who are not employed and are not looking for work.

Table 8. Percentage Breakdown by Age Group of Services Received by WIA Adult Program Exiters, April 2010 through March 2011

Age Group	All Exiters	Core	Core and Intensive Services Only	Training Services	Individual Training Account
18 to 21	10.6%	11.3%	8.7%	11.2%	10.8%
22 to 29	24.3%	24.5%	22.0%	27.8%	29.5%
30 to 44	33.3%	32.7%	33.6%	35.9%	36.5%
45 to 54	19.9%	19.3%	22.1%	18.0%	17.1%
55 and Older	11.9%	12.2%	13.6%	7.1%	6.0%

Source: PY 2010 WIASRD Data Book

Note: The figures in the “Individual Training Account” column do not sum to 100% because of rounding.

Table 9. Percentage of Job Seekers Who Received Training, by Age Group, 2006 to 2010

Age Group	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
18 to 21	25.6%	18.7%	13.6%	11.8%	13.4%
22 to 29	25.6%	18.0%	14.1%	13.1%	14.6%
30 to 44	22.2%	14.9%	12.1%	12.0%	13.6%
45 to 54	17.1%	10.8%	9.3%	9.7%	11.5%
55 and Older	11.2%	7.0%	6.3%	6.5%	7.6%

Sources: WIASRD Data Books, PY 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010

Table 10. Enrollment of Older Adults in Degree- and Credential-Granting Programs at all Two- and Four-Year Colleges and Universities, 2009 to 2010 Academic Year

Age Group	Total Number of Students	Percent of All Students
50 to 64	562,773	3.1%
65 and Older	63,969	0.3%
All Students	18,393,390	100%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System

Table 11. Enrollment of Older Adults in Degree and Credential Granting Programs at all Two-Year Colleges, 2009 to 2010 Academic Year

Age Group	Total Number of Students	Percent of All Students
50 to 64	355,429	4.4%
65 and Older	50,828	0.6%
All Students	8,147,026	100%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System

Older adults make up a slightly greater share of enrollees in degree and credential programs at two-year institutions of higher education.

Although older workers are underrepresented in the credit programs at institutions of higher education, an even lower percentage of them receive grants through the need-based federal Pell Grant financial aid program. Table 12 shows that only a fraction of adults who are 60 or older receive any funding through the Pell Grant program.

Much of the workforce training that community colleges offer is in the form of non-credit programs. Unfortunately, data on participation in non-credit programs are scarce and what information that is available varies greatly from state to state. No national data source is available that details enrollment in non-credit programs by age (Van Noy, Jacobs, Jorey, Bailey, & Hughes, 2008).

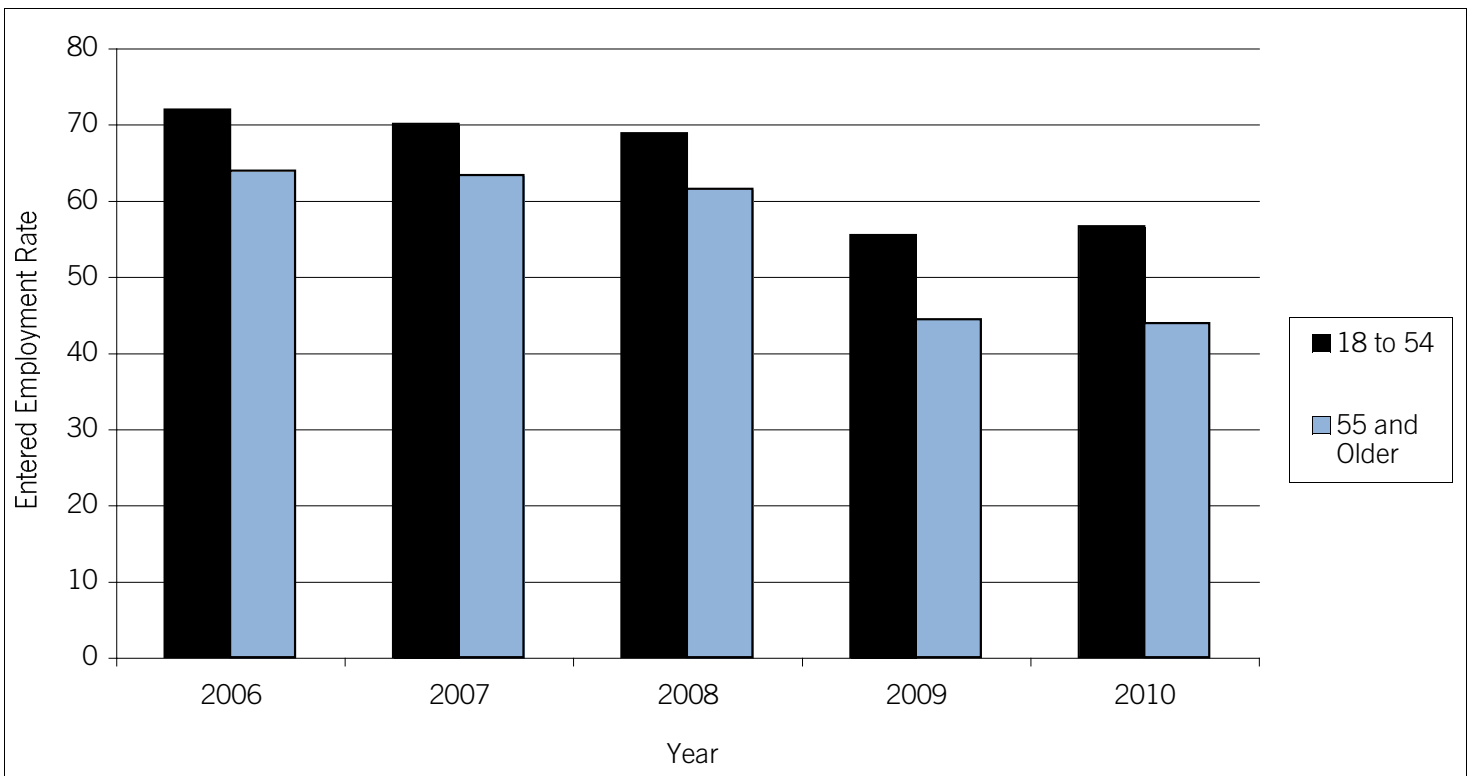
After examining the rate of older adult participation in training programs, Heldrich Center researchers studied the labor market outcomes of older adults who received WIA services. Reflecting the literature on the difficulty the older workers face in the labor market, older workers who exit from WIA services are less likely to become employed than younger exiters. Figure 5 not only shows the lower employment rate for older workers but also highlights prior research, which has found that the Great Recession has had a disproportionately negative effect on older workers. Figure 5 displays the percentage of WIA exiters by age group (18 to 54 and 55+) who were unemployed when they enrolled in WIA services and who were employed in the first quarter after exiting from WIA services.

Table 12. Percent of Pell Grant Recipients 60 or Older, 2001 to 2010

Year	Number of Pell Recipients Age 60 and Older	Total Number of Pell Recipients	Percent of Pell Recipients Age 60 and Older
2000 to 2001	6,345	3,899,433	0.16%
2001 to 2002	6,641	4,340,879	0.15%
2002 to 2003	6,637	4,778,507	0.14%
2003 to 2004	7,595	5,139,638	0.15%
2004 to 2005	6,381	5,308,433	0.12%
2005 to 2006	7,464	5,167,979	0.14%
2006 to 2007	7,199	5,164,959	0.14%
2007 to 2008	8,037	5,542,893	0.14%
2008 to 2009	9,312	6,156,750	0.15%
2009 to 2010	16,849	8,094,024	0.21%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Federal Pell Grant End-of-Year Reports, Years 2000 to 2001 through 2009 to 2010*

Figure 5. Percentage of WIA Exiters Who Were Unemployed at Enrollment Who Were Employed One Quarter after Exit, by Age Group



Sources: *WIASRD Data Books, PY 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010*

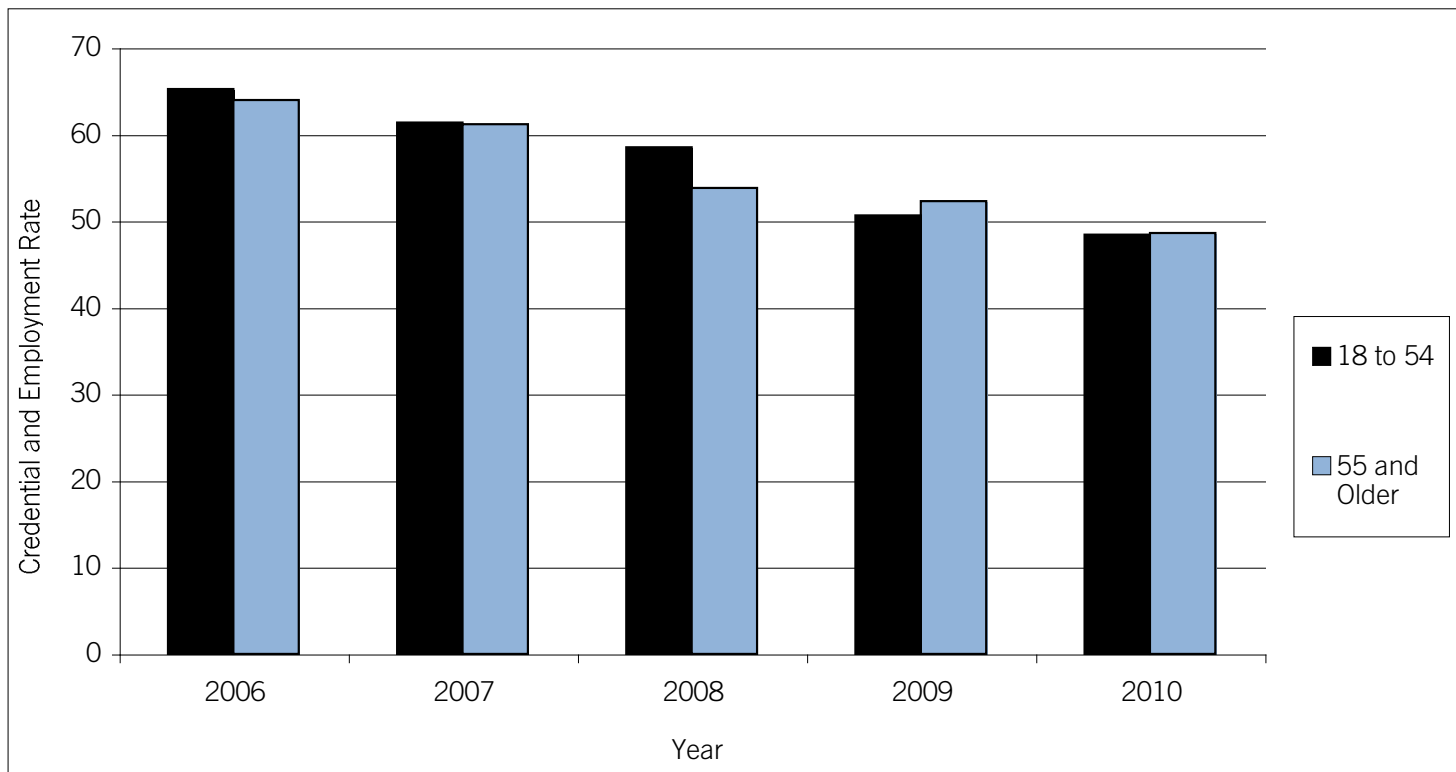
Although older adults who exit from WIA services have weaker employment outcomes and are less likely to access training than their younger counterparts, older WIA exiters who do receive training have success in earning a credential and in becoming employed. Table 13 shows the percentage of WIA exiters who accessed training who earned some type of a credential for the WIA period from 2006 through 2010. The data indicate that adults age 55 and older who accessed training earn a credential of some sort — high school diploma or equivalency, college degree, occupational certificate, or other credential — at about the same rate, and in the four most recent years at a slightly higher rate, than younger WIA exiters.

Table 13. Percentage of WIA Exiters Referred to Training Who Earn a Credential, by Age Group

Age Group	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
18 to 21	73.0%	67.5%	65.5%	59.2%	56.5%
22 to 29	74.7%	69.5%	66.7%	61.1%	59.2%
30 to 44	74.5%	70.0%	65.4%	60.8%	59.1%
45 to 54	75.0%	70.8%	65.4%	59.2%	60.0%
55 and Older	75.0%	71.5%	65.6%	64.1%	62.6%

Sources: WIASRD Data Books, PY 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010

Figure 6. Percentage of WIA Exiters Who Were Employed in the First Quarter after Exit and Earned a Credential by the Third Quarter after Exit, by Age Group



Sources: WIASRD Data Books, PY 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010

As the data illustrate, older individuals enrolled in WIA programs have had some success in earning a credential through training, and older adults who receive training also have some success in obtaining employment after training, relative to individuals from other age groups. USDOL calculates a credential and employment rate, which measures the percentage of WIA exiters who were employed in the first quarter after exit from training and who obtained a credential by the third quarter after. Older adults fare about the same on this measure as younger adults. This indicates that training may be able to shrink the employment rate gap that exists between WIA exiters 55 and older and their younger counterparts.

All in all, the WIA performance data suggest that older adults benefit from training.

Promising Federal, State, and Local Initiatives to Assist Older Job Seekers

Based on information from interviews with national experts and state and local practitioners, as well as on a review of recent literature, a number of potentially promising federal, state, local, and nonprofit initiatives to assist older job seekers have been identified. Most of these address one or more of the challenges referenced earlier. The federal, state, and local initiatives pertaining to the public workforce system fall primarily into four categories:

1. Establishing councils, task forces, or public-private partnerships to examine workforce needs and issues relating to the labor market engagement of older adults and to make recommendations to improve their opportunities (National Governors Association, 2010).
2. Employer outreach and education.
3. Outreach and better delivery of existing services to older workers.
4. Tailoring programs to meet specific needs of older workers (Abraham & Houseman, 2008).

Establishing Councils, Task Forces, or Public-Private Partnerships to Examine Workforce Needs and Issues Relating to Labor Market Engagement of Older Adults

As part of a broader effort to help address changing demographics and the aging workforce, a number of states have established older worker task forces or standing committees, some of which are tied to their state WIB or to other governors' councils on aging. For example, the *Maine* Jobs Council, the state WIB, established an Older Worker Committee, which is charged with promoting the value of Maine's older workers to employers through education, advocacy, and policy development. In 2010, the Committee released a report entitled *Maine's Aging Workforce: Opportunities and Challenges*, which looked at the number of Maine residents who were 50 and over by county in 2008, along with projections for 2018 and 2028. The Maine Department of Labor predicted that between 2002 and 2012, 83 percent of the state's labor force growth would be among people 55 and older. The report discussed Social Security and retirement, employment, education, and employer strategies for attracting and retaining older employees such as flexible work schedules, telecommuting options, training and education

opportunities, phased retirement, and opportunities for mentoring. Among its action steps, the report cited a need for discrimination orientation training for committee members so that they in turn could develop strategies to educate employers.

In *Minnesota*, the Governor's Workforce Development Council (GWDC) convened an Older Workers Workgroup as one of four policy committees to develop recommendations for the Council's 2011 Policy Advisory. The final report, *All Hands on Deck, Sixteen Ideas for Strengthening Minnesota's Workforce* (Minnesota Governor's Workforce Development Council, 2011), makes four recommendations regarding aging workers:

1. Ensure that Minnesota's workforce development system has the capacity to handle the state's looming demographic shifts.
2. Develop a state plan to extend the work life of aging workers, including the establishment of a Mature Worker Taskforce of public- and private-sector leaders to make recommendations for state policies that promote employer efforts to train older workers, expand opportunities for continuous learning, encourage post-retirement work and paid volunteer opportunities, and address pension and retirement income policies that deter returning or continuing to work.
3. Establish Lifelong Learning Accounts to help aging workers finance continuous learning opportunities.
4. Support entrepreneurship and small business development among aging workers.

Several of these recommendations are currently under consideration by the state legislature, including a bill to create lifelong learning accounts.

GWDC also made two sets of recommendations to expand employment opportunities for people with disabilities, including establishing the state as a model employer of people with disabilities, and ensuring that the state's WorkForce Centers (One-Stops) and their services are accessible and usable by Minnesotans with disabilities. The report acknowledged that the proportion of state employees with a self-reported disability had dropped from 7.8 percent to 5.1 percent between 2001 and 2009. Beyond noting that the state has a duty to be a leader in disability employment, it recognized that a third of the Minnesota state workforce had reached the median retirement age of 60, and that tapping the talent pool of Minnesotans with disabilities would be critical to filling the anticipated labor gap.

In 2010, *Kentucky's* Legislative Research Commission developed a report entitled *Workforce Development Options Targeted to Older Kentuckians are Limited* that reviewed 13 publicly funded workforce development programs and whether they adequately address the needs of the state's aging workforce. The report determined that while the population of people 55 and older in the workforce continues to rise, Kentucky has among the lowest employment rates for this age group in the nation. It raised many of the challenges older workers face, including having outdated workplace skills and lacking in technology skills. The report outlined several recommendations to improve workforce development programs for those 55 and older, including: improving transportation services, expanding awareness of employment and training programs, promoting job-specific short-term training as a way to increase the participation of older job seekers, and adapting computer training for the needs of older workers. In addition, according to the study, a Rural Older Worker Alliance was recently formed in Kentucky, including public and private partners such as the CVS Foundation, Center for Disease Control's National

Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Institute for Workplace Innovation at the University of Kentucky, the state AARP chapter, and the National Council on Aging. The group will address issues that affect older workers in rural areas, such as lack of public transportation.

In 2007, with support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, the National Governors Association (NGA) launched a policy academy for states entitled “Civic Engagement: Engaging Seniors in Volunteering and Employment.” Participating states initially included Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Maine, New Mexico, Ohio, and Wyoming, with Idaho, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania joining in 2008. Under the academy, teams of state policymakers representing governors’ offices, workforce development, aging, and other agencies, as well as leaders from community-based organizations such as state AARP offices, worked to develop strategic plans and raise public awareness to encourage greater involvement of senior citizens in both volunteering and paid employment. Several of these states have maintained initiatives started under the NGA academy, such as Illinois, which maintains a group called Generations Serving Generations that partners with the Illinois Policy Academy on the Civic Engagement of Older Adults Leadership Team and hosted a summit on Aging, Education, and Service in late 2011.

Employer Outreach and Education

Employer outreach and education includes programs to inform employers about available resources to accommodate older workers as well as information campaigns designed to highlight the benefits (and reduce the negative stereotypes) of employing older workers. Several strategies for employer outreach and education have been developed, among them recognizing mature worker-friendly employers, developing dedicated sections of Web sites geared toward employers that describe the benefits of hiring older workers, and hosting mature worker job fairs. Many of these efforts, however, operate separately from state and national efforts about individuals with disabilities. For example, similar, yet separate, efforts have been launched to inform employers about hiring and retaining workers with disabilities, including the “Think Beyond the Label” campaign and the “Campaign for Disability Employment.” In addition, more than 60 Business Leadership Networks, affiliates of the U.S. Business Leadership Network, work as part of their missions, to educate and reach out to employers about the value of hiring and retaining workers with disabilities.

Recognizing Mature Worker-Friendly Employers

Several states have begun programs to recognize mature worker-friendly employers, similar to the Best Employers for Workers Over 50 program started by AARP in 2001, which recognizes domestic and international businesses and organizations that have implemented innovative policies and practices to attract and retain mature workers or support a multigenerational workplace. *Arizona, Arkansas, Maine, and Wyoming* each have versions of the mature worker-friendly award or certification. In Arizona, for example, the state’s Mature Worker Council, a committee of the Governor’s Advisory Council on Aging, has certified more than 80 employers in the past three years as being mature worker-friendly. Employers typically display the logo designating this distinction on their Web sites. The state is currently working to reach employers representing a broader base of industries, including State of Arizona government agencies, a major hospital system, and several aerospace employers. Based on recent employer feedback, the Mature Worker Council is considering tweaking the designation to reflect not just mature worker friendliness but also being friendly to a multi-generational workforce.¹⁰

Dedicated Older Worker Web sites

Many states have developed Web sites targeted to older job seekers, including *California, Colorado, Illinois, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wyoming* among others. A number of states include information for employers about the benefits of hiring mature workers tied to their older worker web pages. This includes California, for example, where the state Employment Development Department's Experience Unlimited Web site (http://www.edd.ca.gov/jobs_and_training/experience_unlimited_for_job_seekers.htm) includes, on the one hand, information about job clubs for workers over 40, and, on the other, information specifically geared to employers. The employer information promises free assistance with recruiting, screening, advertising, or referral of experienced professionals from a range of industries, including finance, information technology, human resources, software development, manufacturing, and others.

The Web site for the *Illinois* workforce development system, WorkNet.com, has a portal with information and resources targeted to employers about hiring older, experienced workers (http://www.illinoisworknet.com/vos_portal/business/en/Resources/HiringOlderWorkers/). It emphasizes that hiring older workers “makes good business sense” given the nation's demographics, and provides information on state and federal programs, the AARP Workforce Assessment Tool, and other tips to help employers with planning for an aging workforce.

In *Florida*, Workforce Florida (the state WIB), the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, the Florida Chamber of Commerce, the Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, and members of the state's Silver Edition Taskforce jointly sponsor the Employ Florida Marketplace — Silver Edition Web site (<http://silver.employflorida.com/portals/silver/>). The goal of the Web site is to assist both Florida businesses with their workforce needs and “retirement-aged” job seekers over 50 with finding employment. The Web site includes information about volunteer opportunities in addition to paid employment. In terms of trying to sell employers on hiring older workers, the Employ Florida Silver Edition Web site highlights certain attributes of older workers:

1. They can be flexible in their work arrangements.
2. They may desire periodic or part-time work that offers an opportunity to tailor work schedules to business cycles and requirements.
3. Since they have already retired, they may not require health benefits.
4. They can serve as mentors and role models for younger colleagues.

Florida workforce experts interviewed for this report also highlighted the state's Web site to provide people with disabilities with equipment they can use at work and at home — the Florida Alliance for Assistive Technology. Most states have Web sites that provide information on assistive technology resources, as does the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy's Job Accommodation Network (JAN).¹¹

Mature Worker Job Fairs

Other examples of employer outreach and engagement featured in the literature and in interviews include mature worker job fairs, and in the case of Goodwill *Houston (Texas)*, under the USDOL-funded Aging Worker Initiative, “reverse job fairs” in which it is the trained job seekers, rather than employers, who staff the booths, marketing themselves to employers rather than the other way around (CAEL and Council on Competitiveness, 2011).

Outreach and Better Delivery of Existing Services to Older Workers

Outreach and better delivery of existing services to older workers includes such strategies as assigning mature worker specialists or career navigators to One-Stop Career Centers and changing the venue for delivery of certain One-Stop services.

Mature Worker Specialists at the One-Stops

According to Abraham and Houseman (2008), mature worker specialists may help make older job seekers feel more welcome at the job centers. Several of the 10 regions participating in the USDOL Aging Worker Initiative (AWI) have used the navigator model, including the Macomb/St. Clair Workforce Development Board, Inc., in *Michigan*, Vermont Associates for Training and Development in *Vermont*, and Coastal Counties Workforce Board, Inc., in *Maine*. A report reflecting on preliminary lessons learned under AWI noted that older job seekers in particular may need additional assistance in deciphering new career options and training, and benefit from more intensive assistance with career exploration and job search strategies (CAEL and Council on Competitiveness, 2011). According to USDOL officials interviewed for this report, these navigators serve as active case managers and can help older workers stay connected to the workforce system, community colleges, and employers. Currently, CAEL and the Council on Competitiveness are working with *Indiana* University to develop an online training for mature worker career navigators, which will include techniques for conducting prior learning assessments, through which an individual’s work and life experiences are evaluated with a goal of qualifying for college credits. Others interviewed for this report also mentioned both older workers and individuals with disabilities being served by Disability Program Navigators or Disability Resource Coordinators where they exist.

Outreach to Places Older Workers Frequent

Other efforts in this category include reaching out to older workers at senior centers, libraries, places of worship, or other places where older individuals frequent. Libraries have come to play an increasingly important role as a venue for workforce development services in recent times for all job seekers, sometimes involving local One-Stop staff being stationed there at designated times during the week.

Tailoring Programs to Meet Specific Needs of Older Workers

Many state and local workforce areas have added new services designed with older clients in mind, including peer counseling groups for older job seekers, training programs tailored to older participants, and internship and entrepreneurship opportunities. (This category would also include the development of Web sites geared to older job seekers and employers referenced above.)

Networking/Peer Counseling Groups for Older Workers

Tailoring programs to meet specific needs of older workers includes the development of networking or peer counseling groups targeting older job seekers, and other services designed specifically to serve older adults and dislocated workers who are transitioning to new jobs or careers. For example, the Arapahoe/Douglas Works! workforce center in Arapahoe County, *Colorado*, operates a 50+ & Fabulous Employment Resource Center. The center is described as a “full-service resource center for the mature job seeker” and offers computers with Internet access, and one-on-one résumé and career assistance. In *Arizona*, the Maricopa Workforce Connections One-Stops Boomers & Beyond Job Clubs offer opportunities for peer networking with fellow job seekers.

Mature Services, Inc., in Akron, *Ohio*, has recently developed Job Search Cooperatives for experienced workers in the Cincinnati area. The WIA-supported initiative encourages white-collar, laid-off professionals to function like job developers for each other, moving beyond a typical networking group, with 15 to 20 job seekers essentially forming an ad hoc job search firm.

Training to Meet Specific Skill Needs of Older Adults

Tailoring programs to meet specific needs of older workers also includes training in basic computer skills and in the use of Internet resources for older job seekers. A number of those interviewed for this report as well as information about the Aging Worker Initiative (AWI) demonstration sites have discussed computer training that has been developed specifically for mature job seekers. Some experts believe that older workers prefer and fare better in classes limited to their peers, rather than in multi-generational settings. Under its AWI pilot project, the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County in *Washington State*, is offering a 30-hour Mature Worker Technology Program in partnership with the AARP Foundation and Microsoft. The training includes modules on social networking to assist with job searching.

In another example of an older-worked targeted computer training program, Senior Service America, Inc., a national SCSEP grantee, developed the Digital Inclusion Program, which is directed at learners over the age of 55. This online computer tutorial is designed for older adults, using SCSEP participant “peer coaches” in public settings, including libraries, senior centers, faith-based organizations, and community action agencies to provide assistance when “new learners” struggle, often for the very first time, to use a computer mouse, send and receive emails, and do Internet searches

Some respondents reported providing “pre-training” to older job seekers. The Los Angeles County (*California*) Workforce Investment Board, for example, has created a “Mature Worker Pre-Employment Training Toolbox” that introduces older workers to topics with which they may have limited familiarity, such as technology and job search.

Several of the AWI pilot sites have developed other mature worker training opportunities, such as the South Central WIB in *Pennsylvania*, which has launched training programs both for unemployed job seekers and for incumbent workers 55 and older tied to the state's industry partnerships in health care, manufacturing, and information technology.

Internships for Older Job Seekers

Several workforce areas are developing opportunities for older job seekers to participate in internships. *Indiana's* Tecumseh Area Partnership, Inc. (TAP), under the USDOL Aging Worker Initiative, offers subsidized 30- to 90-day internships to help mature workers get on-the-job experience. In this case, the internships are only available in high-growth industries. Employers have no obligation to hire the interns. *Minnesota* is piloting a program called Shifters to find "midtermships" for people 50 and older who want to try a new occupation. These work experience opportunities are not necessarily paid but are designed to help dislocated workers and others transitioning to new careers. Several people interviewed for this report also highlighted examples where older adult volunteer programs, such as Seniors Corps, RSVP, or Experience Corps, provided opportunities that turned into jobs.

Entrepreneurship Training for Older Workers

Two states, *Virginia* and *Minnesota*, are focusing on older workers as part of a USDOL pilot called Project Growing America Through Entrepreneurship (GATE) II. Project GATE II, launched in 2009, involves providing training to individuals who are interested in opening a business. Both *Minnesota* and *Virginia* are focusing on serving WIA dislocated workers who are 45 and over. An evaluation of the effort is under way.

Promising Nonprofit Initiatives to Assist Older Job Seekers

As a complement to the public One-Stop Career Center system, there are many agencies and organizations in local communities that provide workforce development services and supports, including national, state, and local nonprofit agencies; postsecondary colleges and universities; and national aging organizations. Through interviews and research, the Heldrich Center identified a number of noteworthy initiatives in the nonprofit sector to assist older workers that are currently under way or have recently been completed by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the National Council on Aging (NCOA), AARP, Civic Ventures, and the Partnership for Public Service. These initiatives may offer potential lessons in how to better serve older job seekers and are briefly profiled below.

Improving Community College Options for Older Students: American Association of Community College Plus 50 Initiative

Community colleges are playing an increasingly important role in workforce development and training. With funding from The Atlantic Philanthropies, AACC launched the Plus 50 Initiative in 2008 to expand the capacity of community colleges to develop programming to address the needs of older learners. The original pilot group included 13 two-year institutions that were charged with developing or expanding their colleges' offerings in workforce training and career development, learning and enrichment, and volunteering. Many community colleges have a long history of serving seniors, many of whom in the past have enrolled in personal enrichment programs.

The AACC Plus 50 Initiative has found that, especially in light of the economic downturn, there is particularly strong interest in training and retraining programs that lead to employment opportunities. According to a November 2010 Plus 50 impact report (LFA Group, 2010), 15,000 individuals age 50 and over enrolled in courses associated with the Plus 50 program, and 1,093 more workforce training courses for Plus 50 students were offered during the initiative. The number of students enrolled in workforce training credit courses rose from 455 to 2,505 across all colleges, and the number enrolled in non-credit courses rose from 367 to 3,974. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of the Plus 50 students agreed that their workforce training program helped them to get hired into a job.

An AACC project representative attributed the growth in enrollment to the development of advising and counseling services that were tailored to the special needs, interests, and assets of Plus 50 learners. The project also developed a marketing and outreach strategy to use consistently across the nation, called Rewired, Rehired, and Re-inspired. Cape Cod Community College in *Massachusetts* has established an adult learning center with a specially trained Plus 50 advisor on hand. At Clover Park Technical College in *Washington*, a single point of contact has been developed for Plus 50 students in the form of a “concierge” or ombudsman who assists older students with financial aid and a range of other services. St. Louis Community College in *Missouri* hosts an open house for Plus 50 students that covers information about registration, financial aid, advising services, and other topics pertaining to returning to school. A number of the projects are closely coordinated with One-Stop dislocated worker and Rapid Response programs, such as at St. Louis Community College, which has assisted older dislocated workers from a Chrysler plant.

With support from the Lumina Foundation, AACC has added a completion phase to the AACC Plus 50 initiative, which will encourage Plus 50 students to attain certificates and degrees to enhance employability. This effort will also emphasize prior learning and experience credit for older students and include the use of “completion coaches.”

Web-based Assessment with “Virtual Job Coaches”: AARP WorkSearch

In 2007, the AARP Foundation launched the WorkSearch Assessment System, a web-based system that assesses skills, interests, aptitudes, skill and training gaps, and connects users to training virtually or in the community as well as to job opportunities. AARP Foundation tested models of using “virtual job coaches” — trained peer volunteers who work with clients virtually via discussion groups, email, and phone. More than 52,000 individuals have used WorkSearch in the past year, and 1,200 people have worked with the virtual job coaches since the program began in 2009, an aspect of the model the AARP Foundation is working to expand by helping communities and other organizations build capacity to provide services to low-income older workers. Preliminary data have found that placement rates are higher (30 to 40 percent) for individuals using job coaches than for those without coaches (roughly 25 percent). WorkSearch was created in part to address the needs of older individuals who were not SCSEP-eligible, either because they were too young or did not meet the very low income requirements.

Sector Training and Economic Security Initiatives for Older Workers: National Council on Aging

With support from the U.S. Department of Labor, the National Council on Aging (NCOA), working with the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute (PHI), developed a direct care worker training curriculum to train home care workers in several areas of *New Jersey*, *Pennsylvania*, and *New York City*. The approach was modeled on sector-strategy training programs for in-demand occupations and trained 424 older individuals, ultimately placing 218

of them in unsubsidized employment as Community Health Workers through SCSEP. The pilot sites partnered with employers, community-based organizations, WIBs, and postsecondary educational institutions (National Council on Aging, 2011).

Another NCOA effort under way is the Economic Security Initiative, which was launched in 2009 with the intent of developing a “holistic person-centered approach to economic casework” for older adults, with an emphasis on providing information about jobs, finances, health, legal services, housing, aging network services, and public benefits to older adults through one coordinated venue. NCOA reported that 11 economic security centers are currently operating, 7 of which involve SCSEP as well. Through these resource centers, older individuals are offered benefits “check-ups” to assess whether they are receiving benefits and services for which they are entitled.

Encouraging Encore Careers in Public Service and Nonprofits

Two other noteworthy nonprofit initiatives involve encouraging aging or retired Baby Boomers to undertake second or “encore” careers in public service or nonprofit settings.

Civic Ventures Encore Careers. Civic Ventures, a nonprofit think tank devoted to aging Baby Boomers, work, and social purpose, operates Encore Careers, an online information service that encourages older adults to transition to jobs in the public and nonprofit sectors. Recent efforts have included an Encore College Initiative, which provided grants to 40 community colleges to support programs for retraining Baby Boomers for encore careers, and publications regarding opportunities for second careers in education, health care, and the green economy.

Partnership for Public Service FedExperience. Recognizing the need to fill critical vacancies created by the anticipated retirement of large numbers of federal employees, the Partnership for Public Service launched the FedExperience pilot program. One initiative under way is the Transitions to Government program, through which the Partnership, with the support of Civic Ventures and AARP, is working with IBM to develop a program to recruit IBM employees and retirees for government jobs at agencies including the U.S. Department of Treasury, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Department of Energy-Office of Environmental Management, and the Department of State.

Policy, Technical Assistance, and Research Recommendations

Many public workforce agencies and local One-Stop Career Centers as well as national nonprofit organizations, have expanded the available array of programs and services to older workers in general and modified the way they deliver their employment, education, and employment support services to them. Thus far, these efforts have not been widespread throughout the nation and, while promising and noteworthy, have not quantifiably improved the employment prospects and outcomes for older workers and workers with disabilities in the United States. Stubbornly low employment rates for people with disabilities have prevailed in good economic times and in recessions. And, older displaced workers and older job seekers with or without a disability continue to have difficulty in gaining employment and reemployment at wages that matched their previous career jobs.

As economic circumstances necessitate the need for aging Americans to remain in the labor market, many older individuals (including those aging with a disability and/or chronic health conditions) also can and want to work. Yet, despite considerable efforts, the evidence demonstrates that they still often lack access to viable long-term employment and economic services and supports to help them get a job and keep working. Therefore, the following recommendations are offered to help improve the short- and long-term prospects for older workers and older workers with disabilities.

Policy and/or Legislative Recommendations

Opportunities in the Reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998

Reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) offers an opportunity to better align resources and reinforce evidence-based effective strategies for integrating and better serving older workers in the One-Stop Career Centers both by Title I providers and other One-Stop partners. Different from its predecessor, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA),¹² WIA has positively offered to older workers and individuals with disabilities, as well as to all other job seekers, opportunities to participate in a range of core, intensive, and training services, and a more universal, integrated approach to service delivery. Yet, there are no special services outlined in WIA for older workers or workers with disabilities unless an individual is eligible for (and resources are available from) such programs as SCSEP and/or Vocational Rehabilitation. Although both SCSEP and Vocational Rehabilitation are partners in the WIA system, the degree to which the unique needs of older workers and older workers with disabilities are taken into consideration in a more integrated fashion in terms of planning, workforce board development, resource allocation for set-aside funding, pilots, demonstrations and research, and service provision, remains largely incumbent on the will and interest of state and local officials. In most places around the nation, targeted services or planning to these individuals has not been a universal priority. Therefore, recommendations are offered that would provide a more level playing field for older workers and those aging with a disability seeking services through the public workforce system:

Mandate that the needs of older workers be addressed by WIBs in a designated section of their local plans. Title I, Section 118 (Local Plan) should be amended to require that WIBs develop plans for how they will address the needs of older workers, including older workers aging with or into disabilities. In doing so, WIBs should be required to consult with individuals with expertise in aging, disability employment, and workforce development; employers with demonstrated commitment to employing a mature workforce; aging and disability advocacy and nonprofit organizations; vocational rehabilitation; senior centers; senior housing; transportation; veterans programs; health care providers; Area Agencies on Aging; aging disability resource centers; community colleges and other educational institutions; and others as appropriate.

The goal of these plans for service to older workers would be to:

1. Evaluate the region's demographic makeup, including reviewing 2010 census figures regarding the prevalence of people over the age of 55 or who have a disability, and data regarding the demographics of longer-term unemployed job seekers (including those at 99 weeks of unemployment);
2. Discuss local demographic, economic, and community issues that may have an impact on the success of older workers in the local and regional labor market;

3. Seek opportunities to increase mature worker employment in high-wage, high-demand occupations;
4. Work to improve mature worker basic skills especially regarding digital literacy;
5. Expand older worker opportunities for lifelong learning and certificate and degree attainment;
6. Encourage stronger partnerships between One-Stops and local Area Agencies on Aging;
7. Expand outreach to older individuals in community-based settings such as senior centers, places of worship, public libraries, independent living centers, community colleges, and other venues;
8. Conduct oversight of older worker services and training, including monitoring the number and outcomes of older workers served; and
9. Consider whether an older worker council or advisory group, modeled on the currently mandated Youth Councils, is warranted to ensure WIBs have an array of services targeting this population.

Another goal of these plans would be to help state and local areas move from the current maze of disjointed programs for older Americans and adults with disabilities and toward a more comprehensive and aligned workforce investment system.

Modify the WIA Performance Measures to Better Ensure Older Worker Access to Intensive and Training Services. Title I, Section 131 establishes performance accountability measures that apply across WIA programs to monitor the effectiveness of states in achieving positive outcomes for participants of its programs. As noted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2003), and evident in WIA service data, older workers have predominantly received job search assistance and other core services and have been less likely to receive intensive services or job training. However, an analysis of the performance outcomes of older participants who do receive training services indicates that their outcomes are comparable in terms of credentials and employment to those of younger job seekers. Given the significant structural changes in the labor market, most notably affecting older workers in long-term, low-growth or declining sectors such as manufacturing, older workers require equal access to more robust training opportunities that will more effectively help them transition from less-in-demand occupations and industries to new occupations and careers in local and regional growth sectors. WIBs should be required to review their service records to older workers as part of their planning process to determine whether older participants have only received core services and been underserved in intensive services and training. Further, states with high older worker populations should ensure that the level of service to older workers be part of the negotiation on performance levels (e.g., that higher service to this harder-to-serve population would lower the required performance level), as per ETA-issued guidance found in the Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 29-10, and as the workforce system moves to statistical modeling for the standards, the level of service to older workers should be included in the model.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Labor should establish a broader packet of incentives for One-Stops to serve older workers and those aging with a disability by giving credit for serving these job seekers, by setting targets for the number of older job seekers (and other individuals with complex employment issues) the One-Stop serves, and giving credit to One-Stops for placing older workers in part-time employment and in job-sharing situations.

Authorize the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration to establish a National Technical Assistance and Knowledge Exchange Center with a Network of Regional Satellite Centers at established universities across the nation. During the recent recession, workforce development agencies and professionals were faced with serving an increasing number of unemployed and underemployed workers as they attempted to navigate a difficult and rapidly changing labor market. As the U.S. economy begins to emerge from this economic downturn, workforce professionals are facing unstable federal and state funding environments, and calls for changes in the public workforce system. To perform efficiently and effectively in this transitioning environment, the professional staffs of the nation's workforce development system need high levels of skills and access to timely information and analysis that assists them in performing their important tasks. Additionally, the retirement of large numbers of experienced staff in the workforce system and underinvestment in professional development and training has and will limit the ability of these agencies to meet their basic responsibilities much less have the capacity to transition and innovate.

As the nation looks to rethink and restructure the workforce investment system, it is imperative that a human capital strategy for the nation's workforce investment workers be part of that discussion. To ensure that the employment needs of individuals with barriers to employment, such as older workers and individuals with disabilities, are not relegated to an under-skilled and overworked system of practitioners, reauthorization of WIA should include a more strategic and dedicated system to support its field workers, disseminate findings from research that has been conducted, and foster the use of such findings at the local level.

A National Technical Assistance and Knowledge Exchange Center with a network of regional centers would include close partnerships with the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education, state Departments of Labor, and community colleges to design and provide professional development for workforce staff and deliver technical assistance within specific regions of the nation. The centers would function as a national network, sharing materials, reports, and training curricula with one another. The entire network could be guided by a national coordinating group, consisting of the directors from each of the centers; senior staff of federal labor, aging, and education agencies; and other key stakeholders.

Prioritize funding directions to better align current workforce investment (including WIA, SCSEP, Vocational Rehabilitation, and other programs) training and service offerings for older job seekers based on existing evidence about the types of training services and packages that increase their employment.

As noted in recent research for the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, educational attainments (such as college or full-time technical or vocational school education and education with occupational skills and credentials) have shown to have a positive impact on the entered employment rates among older adults in the WIA system, but longer training lengths among older workers are associated with lower entered employment rates. Other common factors that positively affect older workers' employment include receiving on-the-job training (Zhang, 2011). Given existing data about the employment outcomes of older workers and workers with self-reported disabilities available in federal and state administrative data known today (including but not limited to WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs), U.S. Department of Labor policy and funding direction(s) to state workforce agencies and local One-Stops and U.S. Department of Education policy and funding direction(s) to state vocational rehabilitation programs should reinforce resource and service delivery alignment toward evidence-based strategies, such as on-the-job training and the attainment of occupational skills and credentials that are mostly likely to improve employment outcomes. This priority could also be codified in a reauthorized Workforce Investment Act.

Realign policy directions in the public workforce system around economic security for older workers and workers with disabilities as a long-term goal for the system, not just the delivery of employment, training, and education programs.

The enactment of WIA in 1998 was seen at its time as a significant step forward in better coordinating, consolidating, and improving employment, training, literacy, and vocational rehabilitation programs in the United States.¹³ However, 13 years of operational experience and considerable evidence demonstrate that individuals with barriers to employment looking to get and keep a job, including older workers and people with disabilities, require a supportive and interactive web of services that transcends WIA services and funding alone, and the provisions included in WIA were not sufficient to address participants' more comprehensive needs (including but not limited to issues and service vital to getting to work and remaining employed such as transportation, housing assistance, assistive technology, mental health and addiction treatment, child care, etc.).

The many federal, state, and local agencies and institutions involved in implementing and delivering employment, training, education, and support services programs have risen in an un-strategic, un-coordinated, and un-cohesive manner. This includes a patchwork of programs administered by the federal Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services, and ultimately involves state and local Workforce Investment Boards, One-Stop Career Centers, Area Agencies on Aging, SCSEP providers, Aging and Disability Resource Centers, Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, and others. This has resulted in considerable time and energy taking place at the local level to make sense of it and to provide the array of services (such as employment and training, but also transportation assistance, income support, child care, mental health services, rehabilitation services, financial literacy, etc.) that are imperative for the short-term economic stability of the individuals served and the long-term economic security of themselves and their families. The resources spent to coordinate at the local level what is not coordinated or aligned at the federal level, create significant inefficiencies, and are, at best unsustainable given current and future resource constraints.

Therefore, it is important that the wide array of federal workforce and economic security programs be realigned both in policy direction and practice to think more broadly about economic security as an end game. The existing mechanism at the federal level available to help states achieve systems change has been its waiver authority. For example, Title II, Section 290 of WIA allows states to request waivers of federal rules for various programs, including Wagner-Peyser and the Older Americans Act. This waiver provision was designed to allow states maximum flexibility to develop a more comprehensive workforce investment system.

While states have substantial discretion under WIA for waivers, no federal opportunities are available today to allow states to engage in more comprehensive and wider economic security system development beyond the walls of each separate program's waiver provisions. Allowing states to waive provisions of multiple federal programs to create a big-picture policy change, providing cost-neutrality provisions and rigorous evaluation requirements are available, would help foster more contemporary and innovative approaches that result in more integrated and comprehensive services to individuals with barriers to employment, with a united goal of economic security.

Technical Assistance and Training Recommendations

Provide more dedicated and comprehensive training to One-Stop staff in serving older workers, including those with disabilities, with an emphasis on forging ties to the national aging network.

The first step in improving One-Stop services for older clients and those with age-related disabilities is to upgrade the skills of One-Stop staff in how to better serve older individuals, including those who may have hidden and/or as yet undisclosed chronic health problems. This skills upgrading would include training in how to create a more welcoming environment for older job seekers and how to apply the principles of universal design in the One-Stops, both in terms of physical access as well as programmatic access (e.g., access to resource materials, workshops, and other services). It could include information for staff on how to assist “younger-older workers” in their 40s and 50s versus “older-older workers” in their 60s and 70s and beyond. It could also include a focus specifically on the needs of low-income older workers and older workers with disabilities, as well as the needs of older workers in specific minority groups. In addition, it could include information gleaned from any existing (and future) research about what strategies and services presently appear to best serve older workers. It should also emphasize techniques for how the One-Stops can work more closely with Area Agencies on Aging at the local level, as well as for how state WIBs and state Units on Aging and Aging and Disability Resource Centers can develop better connections to help older workers access the full range of supports they need.

To operationalize the training, partnerships could be developed between the U.S. Department of Labor, the proposed National Technical Assistance and Knowledge Exchange Center, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Administration on Aging), the National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities (NASUAD), the National Council on Aging, or other aging, workforce, disability, and education organizations to implement activities such as but not limited to:

1. Designing and delivering regional training seminars for state and local workforce practitioners, and conducting quarterly national teleconferences and/or webinars on topical issues such as accommodations in the workplace, the changing nature of the work, managing chronic conditions in the workplace, tailoring education and training opportunities to older learners, etc.
2. Seeking opportunities for the presentation of workshops at national and regional workforce development conferences offered by other organizations.
3. Developing a community of practices to facilitate problem solving.
4. Sharing promising models being used in the field such as the “virtual job coach” model used by AARP to support older job seekers in their self-directed job search, peer counseling models, sector strategies, entrepreneurship, targeted community college initiatives, and “learn-and-earn” and on-the-job training models.
5. Sharing promising practices to reach out to the older workers at an earlier intervention stage (i.e., before they lose a job or decide to leave a job for health reasons) through libraries, senior centers, and places of worship.

6. Sharing effective employer outreach strategies, including ways to address the challenges posed by weak employer demand for hiring older workers that may be the result of age discrimination and concerns over older worker costs.
7. Sharing effective practices on how to work across aging, disability, and employment systems, including models for cross-training local staff to ensure they have fundamental knowledge about each others' resources.

Conduct an assessment of the extent and effectiveness of accommodations in the public workforce investment system, using the results to inform and provide dedicated technical assistance and training to One-Stops.

A component central to effective employment assistance, and eventually to successful employment for older workers and older workers with disabilities, is the ability to fund and provide relevant accommodations. Title I, Section 134 of WIA requires One-Stops to make their programs, services, and activities accessible and that programs, services, and activities to One-Stop customers be accessible both physically as well as electronically and technically. While there is evidence that One-Stops and their partners are generally complying with accommodation requirements, little is known about the nature of, extent of, ability to provide, relevancy, and costs for accommodations provided by the public workforce/One-Stop system and its partners to individuals seeking employment assistance services, and/or the ability of workforce professionals to understand and appropriately assess and provide such accommodations.¹⁴

Information from an assessment could be used to produce technical assistance documents (such as toolkits) and provide dedicated technical assistance and training in an effort to improve the One-Stop (and other partner programs such as Vocational Rehabilitation and SCSEP programs) accommodation process, including the use and availability of relevant assistive technology in One-Stops and other partners such as community colleges, help WIBs and One-Stop operators understand more thoroughly the accommodations process, and help local officials access the resources they need to better accommodate job seekers who require such accommodation. This information could complement existing resources of the federally supported Job Accommodation Network (JAN). Research could also focus on the extent to which state workforce/hiring/employment-related Web sites, documents, and processes providing information about the labor market, jobs, employment services, job training, and education and other services are fully accessible to job seekers of all ages with disabilities.

Research Recommendations

Support research that identifies the more promising practices in providing services to older workers (especially those with low income and those with disabilities) that have proven positive employment outcomes.

At the very time that older adults need policies and programs to help them return to work more than ever before, relatively few dedicated public resources devoted specifically to helping older job seekers find work are available, and little is known about their effectiveness. Intense fiscal pressures on federal, state, and local governments virtually ensure that limited resources will continue to be a problem and that resources (especially at the state and local level) will be prioritized toward service delivery and not research and evaluation. In the context of likely substantial need for services in an environment of fewer resources, it is vital that efforts to cultivate employment, education, and training opportunities for older adults be as effective as possible.

Unfortunately, little research has been done to systematically identify strong evidence-based employment and training services and/or promising practices that create work opportunities for older adults. This research can also be used to help inform the technical assistance and training needs of the workforce field.

Support a comprehensive national study on the extent of underreporting of disability status among job seekers, especially those over the age of 55.

During the course of this research, practitioners noted that more often than not, older adults are either reluctant to acknowledge that they have a disability or believe that they do not have a disability or chronic health conditions that may (or may not) affect their employment. This reluctance results in older workers being less likely to seek (or receive) legal accommodations and employer-offered flexible work arrangements that they need to help them remain on the job or to be successful in a new one. It also means that older job seekers do not take advantage of services or accommodations that the public workforce system offers that could help them return to work.

To learn about how often older workers underreport their disability status, a study could be conducted to measure the extent of underreporting of disability among older job seekers. A recent study in four states found that disability status was substantially under-reported among Social Security beneficiaries using the One-Stop system and concluded that One-Stops may be serving more individuals with disabilities than is implied by self-reported information (Livermore & Colman, 2010).

Conduct a national study to learn why older workers are less likely to participate in training than younger job seekers.

The WIA performance outcome data showed that adults age 55 and older who received training earn credentials and enter employment at about the same rate as all cohorts of younger workers, but the WIA service data showed that adults age 55 and older are referred to training at a lower rate than younger job seekers. The data raise the following question: if older job seekers benefit about the same from training as do younger job seekers, why are they less likely to receive training? Many conceivable reasons on why this may be the case are: older workers may be referred to training less often, older workers may be referred but choose not to attend training, or older workers may have higher skill levels and thus have less need for training, among other explanations. A national study to learn why older workers are less likely to participate in training than younger job seekers, even though they benefit just as much from training as their younger counterparts, is recommended. The research would include a qualitative component that would conduct interviews of older workers and One-Stop Career Center staff. Quantitative analyses of unit record data could be used to control for the ages of workers who participate in training and their education levels.

Support an in-depth, longitudinal study of Unemployment Insurance (UI) beneficiaries to assess the extent to which their UI reciprocity is determined, in whole or in part, to age, disability, or age-related disabling conditions.

The percent of workers over the age of 55 in the labor force is growing, yet recent statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) suggest that while older workers are unemployed at lower rates than the national average, they have a higher-than-average likelihood of receiving UI compensation for longer periods of time. As more and more older Americans on UI face longer and longer durations on public benefits, little is known about the demographic characteristics of this older cohort of jobless workers, and factors affecting their UI reciprocity,

such as but not limited to their education and employment backgrounds, work and wage/income (full/part time, temporary, freelance, business owner, etc.) history, occupations and job/career paths, union membership, health and existence of health/mental health conditions, existence of a lifelong disability, public benefit history (such as TANF, SNAP, SSDI, etc.), reemployment strategies, use of One-Stop services, or other factors that may help illuminate the characteristics and factors that may lead to longer-term unemployment.

One strategy might be to modify the currently required report ETA 203, *Characteristics of the Insured Unemployed*, through which states collect detailed demographic information on unemployed workers filing claims, to include disability count data. According to the National Association of State Workforce Agencies, until recently, most states were unaware of the utility of this data source.

Support the acceleration of research into practice through initiation of a cross-aging disability employment system research agenda that includes not just evidence on effective service interventions but also research on how to translate findings more quickly into practice.

The nexus of employment, aging, and disability, as evidenced in discussions at a December 2010 forum on the Disability Implications of an Aging Workforce (NTAR Leadership Center, 2011) will become more urgent as the U.S. population ages, as the number of workers over 55 becomes a larger share of the labor force, and as a larger number of people with age-related chronic health conditions and longer-term disabilities live longer and work longer. Respondents to this research paper have noted that “the lack of coordination between agencies that support research, its translation into practices, and the adoption of science-based innovations is one of the major barriers to closing the gap between knowledge and application” (Washko, Schack, Gaff, & Publin, 2011), asserting that not enough coordination has been done to bring research and practitioner interests in the fields of aging, employment, and disability together to coordinate investments in research, to share knowledge, and to develop and sustain a system of taking research to practice more quickly.

To accomplish this, a process should be started that bolsters existing convening efforts and/or brings together federal agencies that fund scholarly and applied research in the areas of aging, disability, and employment, with the mission of coordinating research development and funding as well as integrating translation activities into the process. These efforts could also include an assessment of the existing mechanisms (such as technical assistance contracts and centers, field directives from various federal agencies, etc.) to look at how well local practitioners (such as One-Stops, SCSEP providers, Area Agencies on Aging, Aging and Disability Resource Centers, etc.) are receiving the information they need. The assessment could also examine what state and local officials believe to be the best ways information can be disseminated and transferred to the field to better inform its practice today and five years from now. The National Technical Assistance and Knowledge Exchange Center recommended above could be a key partner in this effort.

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Appendix A. Individuals and Organizations who Contributed to the Research

A total of 586 individuals participated in an online stakeholder outreach effort. Of these, 548 identified the type of agency they represented. The results are as follows:

State Government Workforce Agency (state level)	15%
State Workforce Investment Board - Board Members and Staff	3%
One-Stop Career Center Staff	12%
Local Government Workforce Personnel not in the One-Stop or Workforce Investment Board	1%
Local Workforce Investment Board	11%
Community-Based Provider of Employment Workforce Services	9%
Senior Community Service Employment Program Provider	35%
Postsecondary Educational Institution	2%
For-profit organization	3%
Other	8%
Total	100%

Note: "Other" included State Units on Aging, other state government agencies, representatives of mature worker councils, Tribal governments, residential centers for adults with disabilities, and other organizations.

Agencies and Organizations Interviewed

AARP Foundation

American Association of Community Colleges Plus 50 Initiative

American Association of People with Disabilities

Arapahoe County Human Resources, 50+, Colorado

Arizona Department of Economic Security

Arizona Governor's Office on Aging

Broward County Workforce Development Board, Florida

Burton Blatt Institute

Consortium on Citizens with Disabilities

Council on Adult and Experiential Learning

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Juneau, Alaska

District of Columbia Department of Employment Security

DuPage Workforce Board, Illinois

Experience Corps

Experience Works

F.E.G.S.

Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation

Goodwill Industries International

International Association of Jewish Vocational Services

Idaho Commerce and Labor

Illinois Department of Economic Security

Mature Services Inc., Akron, Ohio

National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities

National Association of State Workforce Agencies

National Association of Workforce Boards

National Council on Aging

National Disability Rights Network

National Easter Seals, Inc.

National Governors Association

National Organization on Disability

National Skills Coalition

New York State Department of Labor

Oregon Workforce Partnership

San Bernadino Workforce Investment Board, California

Senior Corps

The WorkPlace, Inc., Bridgeport, Connecticut

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging, Office of Policy Analysis and Development

U.S. Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research

U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration

U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration

Virginia Department for the Aging

Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services

West Central Job Partnership, New Castle, Pennsylvania

Workforce West Virginia

Worksystems, Inc., Portland, Oregon

Appendix B. Additional Bibliography

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Endnotes

1. This report does not consider the Unemployment Insurance system.
2. Telephone interview with Joe Carbone, CEO, The WorkPlace, Inc., April 5, 2011.
3. Email correspondence with U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Policy Development and Research, Division of Strategic Planning and Performance, June 15, 2011.
4. This report does not include the Unemployment Insurance system.
5. From May 2009 through spring 2011, ATAA was known as the Reemployment Trade Adjustment Allowance (RTAA). (Private communication with U.S. DOLETA, June 2011).
6. Data on those receiving WIA services dates back to the year 2000. However, because of a change between 2005 and 2006, the data on the number and percent of adults 55 and older from PY 2006 and afterwards is not comparable to the data from previous years. "Between 2005 and 2006 some states began to co-enroll (and make self-services available) some or all of their Wagner-Peyser (WP) participants in WIA by design. If the WP programs had higher shares of people 55 and older then this may be responsible in part, to the extent that WP participants are in that age group with more frequency" (Personal email communication with USDOLETA, June 24, 2011).
7. WIA only reports data on what it calls "exitors." There is no separate dataset for participants, because everyone who participates in WIA services is eventually classified as an exiter, either because they are done receiving services or because they drop out of the program. In this report, therefore, the terms "exiter" and "participant" are used interchangeably. Only in the discussion of outcomes is the term "exiter" used.
8. Each year, WIA compiles data on all individuals who exited WIA services for the year. The data include attributes of the individuals served and outcomes these individuals realized from after exiting WIA services (Social Policy Research Associates, 2011).

9. Since about 85 percent of individuals who access WIA services present themselves as “unemployed” (USDOL ETA, 2010), Heldrich Center researchers sought to gauge whether workers age 55 and older are being served at the same rate as workers of different age groups by calculating how many older workers were being served relative to the number of older unemployed individuals. The same calculation was made for younger adults, and then the number of unemployed adults in each age category as a percentage of all adults in that age category who were unemployed were compared.

10. Similar to employer outreach efforts for mature workers, distinct initiatives have emerged to recognize employers who are leaders in hiring individuals with disabilities such as efforts through the U.S. Business Leadership Network and the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy. A number of state initiatives also exist. Florida recently recognized nine employers for being disability-friendly. The awards were made by the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Blind Services, and Vocational Rehabilitation. Since 1979, the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities has highlighted the efforts of employers to hire and retain employees with disabilities, including annual awards for small, medium, large, and nonprofit employers and an entrepreneurship award for a business owner with a disability. The Louisiana Governor’s Office of Disability Affairs recognizes an employer of the year to honor a company that actively recruits, hires, and accommodates workers with disabilities.

11. Over the years, Web sites dedicated to promoting the talents, skills, and abilities of individuals with disabilities for employment have emerged. These include Web sites for employers such as the Employer Assistance and Resource Network or EARN, or Web sites dedicated specifically for job seekers with disabilities such as disability.gov, HireAbility.com, Accessibleemployment.com, and disabledperson.com (for example).

12. Under the JTPA program, services for older workers were specified under Section 204(D) and Section 202(c)(1)(D), which required that 5 percent of the federal allocation to states had to be used for older worker services. Most of the services provided to older workers were from two distinct programs: the Senior Community Service Employment Program and the Services for Older Workers. Under WIA, no single population is targeted for services.

13. Workforce Investment Act, Title I, Public Law 105-220–Aug. 7, 1998 112 Stat. 936.

14. As part of the Disability Employment Initiative, the Office of Disability Employment Policy will be studying the accessibility of the One-Stop Career Centers.

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About ODEP

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) provides national leadership on disability employment policy by developing and influencing the use of evidence-based disability employment policies and practices, building collaborative partnerships, and delivering authoritative and credible data on employment of people with disabilities.

About the NTAR Leadership Center

Founded in 2007 under a grant/contract with the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor, the NTAR Leadership Center's mission is to build capacity and leadership at the federal, state, and local levels to enable change across workforce development and disability-specific systems that will increase employment and economic self-sufficiency for adults with disabilities.

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