



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

55 Utley Drive, Camp Hill, PA 17011

Voice: (717) 975-2004 or (888) 250-5175 TTY: (888) 559-2658 Fax: (888) 524-9282

Email: parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org Website: parehabilitationcouncil.org

OVR Policy & State Plan / Customer Satisfaction Committee Minutes for August 29, 2023

Members Present (P)

Not Present (NP)

Lynn Heitz (P)
Susan Tomasic (NP)

Michelle Paonessa (NP)
Jessica Keogh (P)

Julia Grant Barol (P)
Paul Fogle (P)

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Staff Present: James Whitonis, Cheryl Novak, Danielle Schmidgall, Mike Kirby

Project Staff Present: Chris Todd

CALL TO ORDER

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. Ms. Lynn Heitz called the meeting to order at 2:30 PM.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES

MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to accept today's agenda and past meeting minutes. Ms. Jessica Keogh seconded the motion. All were in favor.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS:

OVR Updates

Employment Supports Policy

- Mr. Doug Rand reported that the Employment Supports Policy workgroup reviewed the revised Employment Supports Policy and during the public comment period over 160 public comments were received, areas of the Policy have been reviewed with the Council and State Board, and as a result of the comments OVR decided to take a step back and review.

- Moving forward OVR will be meeting with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) experts on Supported Employment regarding current trends, performance based model versus services based / hour to hour model. OVR plans to meet with stakeholders and providers to review comments, reconvene the workgroup to consider if additional changes are needed, and agrees that some changes to the policy will be necessary. Looking at data, success rates appeared to be relatively good and OVR will be further reviewing data and analysis. OVR is currently providing services under the policy that is in place. OVR went through Federal monitoring in 2019 and there were no findings with the current policy. There is no timeline in place. Data can be pulled to differentiate between Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) and Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS) services. Generally, there is less utilization for BBVS services.
- Ms. Heitz inquired about data differentiating between BVRS and BBVS Services. Stated that you may find that Supported Employment (SE) providers may have no clue how to work with customers with a visual impairment. Inquired if there are trainings provided for working with different disability populations.
- Mr. Rand explained that there are trainings at a local level. Vendors are required to have credentials which includes trainings about different disability types including vision loss.

Audiological Services Policy

- Ms. Cheryl Novak reported that OVR is working on finishing an initial draft of the Audiological Services policy within the next week or two. The policy workgroup will meet once the draft is complete to review and finalize a timeline. The Vehicle and Driving Services policy will be completed within the next few weeks as the State Board will be voting on that on September 14, 2023. The Early Reach policy has been tabled. The Financial Needs Test (FNT) policy has been delayed due to temporary measures / motions that were approved by the State Board. OVR would like to have an updated FNT policy approved by the time those motions expire in 2024.

Description A of the 2024-2028 State Plan

- Ms. Lynn Heitz shared concerns about the OVR response to the PaRC recommendation that states, within 30 days of the adoption of the State Plan, interact personally at least one time with individuals whose cases have been delayed or inactive since March 2020 either by phone, in-person meeting, or virtual meeting.
 - The OVR response states, through the months of April-June 2023 OVR conducted a Lean 5S project requiring all staff to reach out to existing customers and ensure that they are actively engaged. If they were not actively engaged staff updated those cases to reflect current goals or closed cases when they were unable to connect with a customer. Customer engagement remains a central piece of OVR's Rapid Engagement Strategy and staff will continue to make sure customers are continuously engaged

with our system. Staff are also responsible for maintaining continued Rapid Engagement strategies to ensure cases progress timely and office managers and supervisors have been tasked with developing monitoring and supervisory procedures to ensure compliance with federal service provision timeframes.

- Ms. Heitz shared concerns that customers are contacted through a mailed letter providing customers notification that failure to respond within 30 days will result in a closed case and that many customers may not have the technology or capability to read a printed letter within that timeframe.
- Providing names to OVR of those who have not been contacted may result in their issue being fixed but shared concerns for those who did not know to call resulting in their cases to be closed without their knowledge.
- Ms. Barol agreed this is an issue, we need to be able to get in touch with people, and that this is similar to the lack of response to exit surveys. There needs to be solutions and one may include an internship role that provides outreach to those that haven't responded to a letter or survey.
- Ms. Heitz reviewed the recommendation, "To increase response rates, OVR will consider using Summer Interns to call customers and complete the surveys using the communication method which best meets the needs of the customer." With the OVR Response: Currently OVR has a devoted staff member who handles the above but will certainly consider additional resources to complete these tasks. Shared concerns that the responses are not adequate and inquired how to move forward.
- Ms. Cheryl Novak explained that OVR's policy requires counselors to make three attempts to contact a customer before a case can be closed. There is no guarantee that both counselors and customers are following through with correspondence. There is not any general reluctance in utilizing an intern but that would not be a permanent solution as interns' positions are temporary.
- Members agreed that it's important that there is another way to ensure that people have access and that this issue needs to be worked on. Spring, Summer, and Fall interns could be utilized.
- Mr. James Whitonis informed attendees that OVR is on board with the idea of utilizing interns and the reason why the language is as written is just in case OVR did not have the resources, were an unexpected issue to occur. Suggested considering a quality assurance policy to ensure that three attempts have been made to correspond with each customer.
- Members suggested forming a review board to review closed cases on a quarterly basis in all District Offices.
- Mr. Doug Rand agreed that a case review process for closed cases is a great suggestion and will take that back to the Executive Team. Some of this information may already be captured in parts of the current case review process at the field level. Requested members to provide specific instances so that OVR may perform a review and follow up with counselors which could lead to teachable moments for counselors. All OVR customers have the right to contact the Client Assistance Program (CAP) regarding closed cases.

Description C of the 2024-2028 State Plan

- Mr. Whitonis reported that the next steps for the State Plan are to assemble all of the parts into the new format from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), have a rough draft prepared for the State Board review for September 2023, the draft should be solidified by the end of September and submitted to the Council for review prior to the public comment period scheduled for October 2023.
- Members agreed to hold the next Committee meeting for September 26th from 2:30 PM to 3:30 PM.

Adjourn

MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to adjourn. Ms. Jessica Keogh seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.