**Executive Summary**

***Synopsis.*** The key finding of the 2015 Kessler Foundation National Employment and Disability Survey is that Americans with disabilities are striving to work. They are working, actively preparing for employment, searching for jobs, seeking more hours, and successfully overcoming barriers in the workplace.

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***Objective.*** The Kessler Foundation Employment Survey was designed as a nationally representative, scientifically rigorous, and transparent means of exploring the experiences of Americans with disabilities in finding and maintaining employment.

*Caption: The infographic, titled, “Reframing the Dialogue, Shaping the Future,” depicts the text, “Not Working,” with a green arrow pointing to the words, “Striving to Work,” and “Facing Barriers,” with a blue arrow pointing to the words, “Overcoming Barriers.”*

The Kessler Foundation Employment Survey, conducted by the University of New Hampshire (UNH):

* refocuses the national discourse on employment and disability toward striving to work and overcoming barriers;
* informs the creation of new priorities and programs that address the job search and workplace experiences of people with disabilities; and
* may influence the future of employment for Americans with disabilities.

The Kessler Foundation Employment Survey includes information collected from six subpopulations categorized by their work-related experiences: individuals who are working and not looking for new work (29.9 percent), individuals who are working and are looking for new work (12.7 percent); individuals who previously worked and are looking for work (7.9), individuals who previously worked and are not looking for work (43.6 percent); individuals who never worked and are looking for work (0.8 percent), and individuals who never worked and are not looking for work (5.1 percent).

***Striving to Work.*** People with disabilities are striving to work, as indicated by the 68.4 percent who are currently working, or looking for work, or have worked since the onset of disability. The fact that people with disabilities are striving to work is demonstrated by other findings. Those who are currently employed are working an average of 35.5 hours per week; 60.7 percent work more than 40 hours per week, and 40.6 percent want to work more hours.

***Preparing for Work.*** People with disabilities are actively preparing for employment—another indicator that they are striving for work. Among non-working job seekers, the top three activities used to prepare for work are:

* obtaining medical treatment/rehabilitation (72.7 percent),
* getting other help from friends and family (62.4 percent), and
* going to school/college (47.1 percent).

***Searching for Jobs.*** People with disabilities are actively searching for jobs, yet another way they are striving for work. Among non-working job seekers, the top three approaches used to search for work are:

* looking for and applying for jobs online (76.7 percent),
* through friends or relatives (68.1 percent), and
* contacting employers directly (61.2 percent).

***Overcoming Barriers–Job Search.*** People with disabilities are overcoming barriers when looking for jobs. Non-working job seekers were asked about their experience with barriers in the job search process. The top three barriers they faced are:

* 41.1 percent report not enough education or training, with 38.5 percent of these individuals overcoming this barrier,
* 36.0 percent report employers assuming they can’t do the job, with 32.8 percent of these individuals overcoming this barrier, and
* 25.6 percent report a lack of transportation, with 41.9 of these individuals overcoming this barrier.

The job search barrier most likely to be overcome is family members discouraging them from working, with 10.4 percent reporting this barrier, and 63.1 percent of these individuals overcoming it. The barrier least likely to be overcome is being denied health insurance or other work-related benefits, with 19.8 percent reporting this barrier, and only 16.3 percent of these individuals reporting that they overcame it.

***Overcoming Barriers–In the Workplace.*** Current workers were asked about their experience with barriers in the workplace. The top three barriers they are faced are:

* 16.5 percent report getting less pay than others in a similar job, with 38.6 percent of these individuals overcoming this barrier,
* 15.7 percent report attitudes on the part of their supervisor, with 41.3 percent of these individuals overcoming this barrier, and
* 15.5 percent report attitudes on the part of their coworkers, with 54.5 percent of these individuals overcoming this barrier.

The workplace barrier most likely to be overcome is family members discouraging them from working, with 6.5 percent reporting this barrier, and 64.3 percent of these individuals overcoming it. The barrier least likely to be overcome is lack of job counseling, with 5.5 percent reporting this barrier, and 33.3 percent of these individuals reporting that they overcame it.

***Workplace Accommodations.*** The provision of workplace accommodations is not just a central tenet of the Americans with Disabilities Act, it is an important facet of corporate America’s efforts to attract and keep exceptional and talented employees. Among current workers, the top three accommodations are:

* 28.4 percent report having flexible schedules (flexible start and end times, work at home, taking more breaks),
* 14.0 percent report having modified job duties (reduced hours, light duty, less demanding job tasks), and
* 13.6 percent report building accessibility being addressed.

These findings support the current trends in workplace culture, where flexible work arrangements are valued by all employees. Organizational policies that allow flexible work arrangements and modified job duties have tremendous potential in supporting persons with disabilities in the workplace.

***Methods.*** The Kessler Foundation Employment Survey was conducted using standard, replicable survey practices. A telephone survey was conducted across the United States of randomly selected adults ages 18 to 64 with a self-reported disability. A sample of households was selected using a random digit dialing (RDD) procedure on both landline and cellular telephones. A set of disability questions, based in part on the American Community Survey disability items, and an age question, were used to identify households with at least one adult with a disability aged 18 to 64. Interviews were completed with 3,013 persons. The response rate was 13 percent. Interviews were conducted from October 17, 2014 through April 23, 2015, by the UNH Survey Center and Penn State University Survey Research Center.

***Closing Comments.*** This Executive Summary contains only the major findings of the 2015 Kessler Foundation Employment & Disability Survey. The full report, available at KesslerFoundation.org, contains many more powerful and insightful statistics and analyses. Many more analyses are planned for these data. In the coming years, a de-identified person-level data file and corresponding codebook will be released to the public. All are also invited to use the survey instrument and even take the survey online at [www.ResearchOnDisability.org/KesslerSurvey](http://www.ResearchOnDisability.org/KesslerSurvey). Please let us know if you find this survey to be useful in your work. Look for updates on Twitter #KFSurvey15.