

# WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**



**2021-2023 BIENNIAL REPORT**

The Honorable Tony Evers  
Office of the Governor  
115 East, State Capitol Building  
Madison, WI 53702

Oct. 16, 2023

Wisconsin State Legislators  
State Capitol Building  
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Evers and Members of the Legislature:

I am pleased to submit DWD's 2021-2023 biennial report, which summarizes one of the most transformative periods in our agency's history of building and strengthening Wisconsin's workforce in the modern economy.

Wisconsin's economy has been on a winning streak, with a record low unemployment rate of 2.4% in May 2023 and continued historically low unemployment rates through the present. The state also posted a record high number of jobs in August 2023 and boasts a labor force participation rate that consistently outpaces the national rate. These incredibly positive numbers are in part a tribute to the effectiveness of DWD programs such as Youth Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship<sup>1</sup>, which saw record-breaking participation in 2022, as well as groundbreaking workforce programs under Gov. Evers' leadership that helped Wisconsin bounce back from the COVID-19 pandemic stronger and more ready than ever to prosper in the 21st century and beyond. Highlights of DWD's 2021-2023 activities include:

- DWD led the implementation of Gov. Evers' \$158 million Workforce Solutions Initiative<sup>2</sup> with American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. The three programs under the initiative – Workforce Innovation Grants, Worker Advancement Initiative, and Worker Connection – were administered through DWD's Division of Employment & Training. The initiative positively impacted close to 16,000 Wisconsinites through June 2023.
- DWD launched a multi-year, unprecedented modernization of its Unemployment Insurance (UI) system including replacement of the existing antiquated mainframe with a modern and adaptable system. When complete, the system will deliver end-to-end services in a timely and efficient manner with modern online tools. The UI Division also made improvements to promote equitable access, improve responsiveness, ensure timely payment of benefits, and prevent and detect fraud.
- The Equal Rights Division made dramatic customer-service improvements through expanded web-based services including transitioning its child labor work permit system online and launching an online civil rights complaint form and new secure portals to access individual case information and commonly requested datasets.
- Within the span of the biennium, DWD's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation<sup>3</sup> (DVR) met nearly its entire five-year goal to enroll 500 participants in the U.S. Department of Education-funded, \$14 million Career Pathways Advancement Initiative<sup>4</sup>, reaching 500 participants in August 2023. This successful implementation led the federal agency to grant DVR an additional \$6.4 million in September 2023 to enroll 300 additional participants into the initiative.
- The Worker's Compensation Division implemented a staff-recommended proposal to digitize incoming mail for Uninsured Employer's Fund investigators, increasing remote access and opening the door to digitizing older files.
- DWD's flexible telecommuting policy, updated and operationalized through DWD's Administrative Services Division, enabled DWD to reach a more skilled and diverse applicant pool across Wisconsin with offers of remote work, resulting in more applicants seeking employment for DWD positions. The policy also drove DWD employee retention with staff citing a flexible work environment a top reason for staying at DWD.

It has been and remains an honor to lead this agency, and I am proud of what DWD has accomplished under Gov. Evers' leadership. We have hit the ground running in these first few months of the 2023-2025 biennium and look forward to sharing our continued progress in future reports.

Sincerely,



Amy Pechacek, Secretary  
Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

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## Department Overview

The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) is the state agency charged with building and strengthening Wisconsin's workforce in the 21st century and beyond. DWD efficiently delivers effective and inclusive services to meet Wisconsin's diverse workforce needs, and advocates for the protection and economic advancement of all Wisconsin workers, employers, and job seekers. The Department's vision is a thriving Wisconsin economy in which:

- ▶ All workers are treated fairly, with dignity and respect;
- ▶ Employers, government, educational institutions, and workers collaborate to ensure workforce programs meet current and future needs; and
- ▶ Every job provides the wages and benefits necessary to support workers' basic needs, invest in their future, and actively engage with their families and communities.

DWD supports a broad spectrum of employment programs and services available throughout the state at numerous service locations and on the internet at [dwd.wisconsin.gov](https://dwd.wisconsin.gov). These programs and services provide specialized training, recruitment, and retention assistance to potential employees and private-sector businesses. DWD is also responsible for administering the state's Unemployment Insurance program<sup>5</sup>, investigating complaints of workplace discrimination, and coordinating Worker's Compensation insurance.

Staff at DWD are committed to ensuring training and employment opportunities are aligned to high-wage, high-growth jobs, and encourage active and engaged participation from the private sector in developing Wisconsin's workforce to meet current and future talent demands.

The Department is led by Secretary Amy Pechacek, appointed by Gov. Tony Evers in December 2020.



Amy Pechacek, Secretary

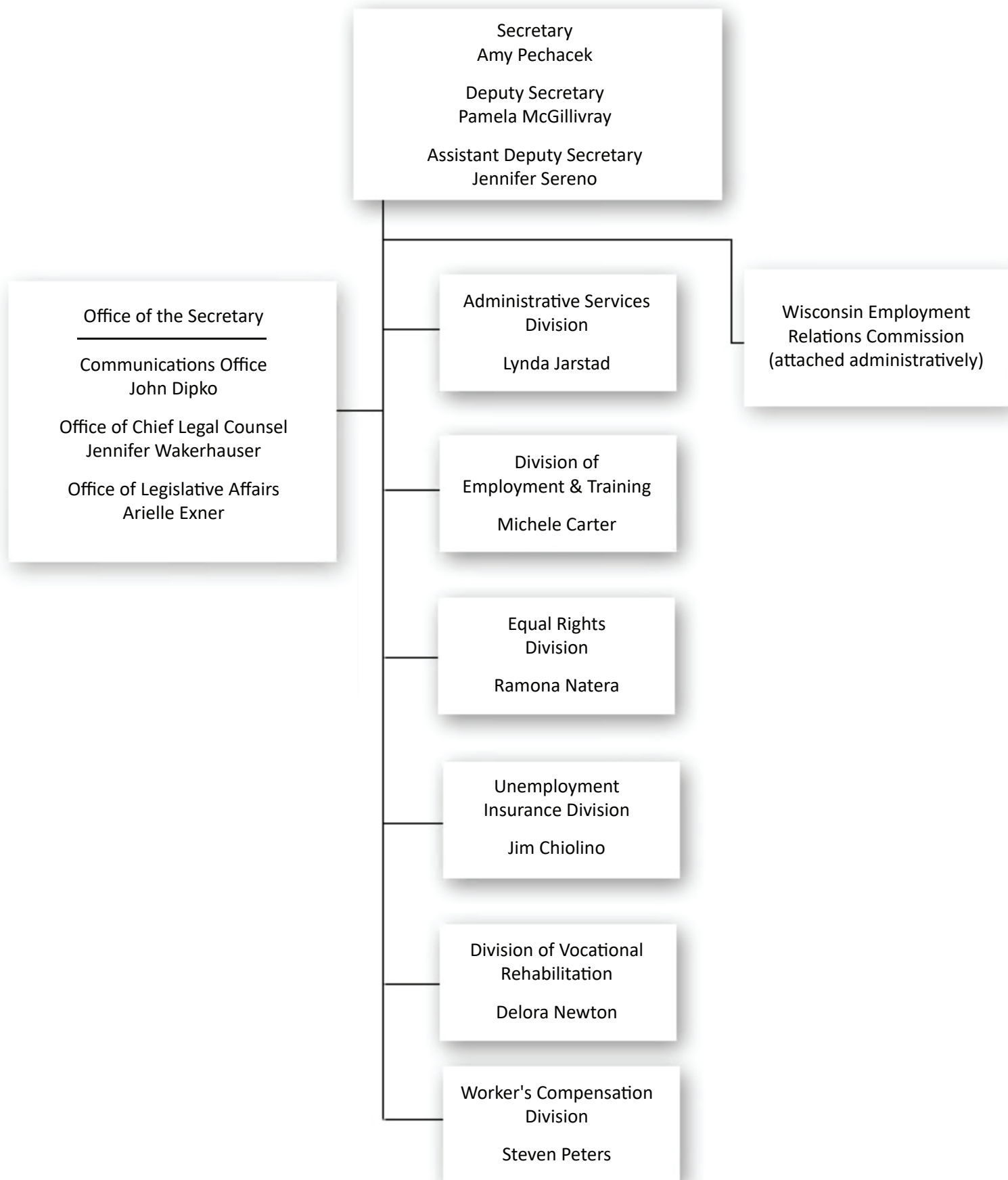
## DWD by the Numbers\*

- ▶ Total number of locations: **58**
- ▶ Full-time equivalent positions: **over 1,700**
- ▶ Budget: **over \$690 million**
- ▶ Grant funds awarded: **nearly \$331 million**
- ▶ Website: **<https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/>**
- ▶ Customer service telephone number: **(608) 266-3131**

\*Positions, locations, budget, and grants as of June 2023



## DWD Organization



## Internal Structure and Department Management

### Office of the Secretary

The Office of the Secretary is responsible for day-to-day management of the department. This includes promoting the department's mission to provide a system of employment-focused programs and services that enables individuals and employers to fully participate in Wisconsin's economy and remain globally competitive.

The Office of the Secretary is also responsible for carrying out Governor Evers's vision for workforce development by developing, implementing, and enhancing programs and policies that increase economic stability and opportunity for all Wisconsinites.

The Office of the Secretary includes:

#### ***Secretary***

Appointed by Governor Evers, Secretary Amy Pechacek works in close collaboration with all Cabinet members; the Legislature; state agencies; community, business, and labor leaders; and other public and private organizations and interest groups to ensure the department's overall mission and goals provide value to Wisconsin's residents.

#### ***Deputy Secretary***

Deputy Secretary Pamela McGillivray serves as a surrogate for Secretary Pechacek and is responsible for the day-to-day internal operations of the department, including the department's budget, resolution of all critical issues, and oversight of major contracts.

#### ***Assistant Deputy Secretary***

Assistant Deputy Secretary Jennifer Sereno serves as a surrogate for Secretary Pechacek and is the chief policy advisor to the Secretary, managing external relations for the agency, including legislative, communications, and legal affairs.

#### ***Office of Legislative Affairs***

Legislative Liaison Arielle Exner is the agency's primary contact for the state's 132 legislators, as well as Wisconsin's Congressional delegation. She responds to legislative inquiries made on behalf of residents of Wisconsin. She tracks legislation that has the potential to impact the agency and meets with lawmakers and other stakeholders to educate them on DWD's mission and core services. She also serves as the department's liaison to the 11 federally recognized Tribes with elected or appointed Tribal governments in the state.

#### ***Office of Communications***

The responsibility of the Office of Communications, led by Communications Director John Dipko, is to share department information and to ensure the department responds to requests for information from the news media in an accurate, timely, and comprehensive fashion. The office also works with each of the divisions to build awareness of the many programs, innovations, achievements, and issues related to DWD.

### ***Office of Chief Legal Counsel***

DWD Chief Legal Counsel Jennifer Wakerhauser provides legal advice to the Office of the Secretary and the department's program managers, acts as the legal custodian for public records purposes, oversees rulemaking and privacy for the department, supervises attorneys in the Office of Chief Legal Counsel, represents the department before administrative tribunals, and acts as department's litigation contact with the Wisconsin Department of Justice.



Nursing students are sharpening their skills at the Advocate Aurora Simulation Center at Aurora BayCare Medical Center. The lifelike mannequin in the bed can "talk" and "breathe," offering the students a chance to check vitals and practice other skills in preparation for working with real patients. The training is part of the \$128 million investment of ARPA funds into the Workforce Innovation Grant program. Secretary Amy Pechacek visited the center with WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes in Oct. 2022. At far left is Aurora BayCare Medical Center President Thomas Miller.

## DWD DIVISIONS

### Division of Employment and Training (DET)

#### *Mission*

To provide a seamless continuum of services accessed by employers and members of the workforce and their families with the following results:

- ▶ Employers have the talent they need, and
- ▶ Individuals and families achieve economic independence by accessing job search, training, and related services, making sound employment decisions, and maximizing their workforce potential.

#### *Program Summary*

DET oversees all workforce services administered by DWD, including the state labor exchange system and Job Center of Wisconsin<sup>6</sup> (JCW), analyzes and distributes labor market information, monitors migrant worker services, manages the Wisconsin Fast Forward (WFF) grant program, and operates the state apprenticeship programs.

Photo: Courtesy of Wisconsin Technical College System



Started in 2016, the Wisconsin Arborist Registered Apprenticeship program was the first of its kind in the nation.

### Worker’s Compensation Division (WC)

#### *Mission*

To promote a healthy, safe work environment by maintain a balanced system of services to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Wisconsin Worker's Compensation Act. The Division's work to ensure compliance includes, among other efforts, advancing worker protections and providing exceptional customer service – both of which are areas of focus in DWD's current long-term strategic planning efforts.

#### *Program Summary*

WC manages the Wisconsin worker's compensation claims program and administers programs designed to advance worker protections by ensuring that injured workers receive prompt payment of required benefits from private insurance companies or self-insured employers. WC also encourages rehabilitation and reemployment for injured workers, and promotes the reduction of work-related injuries, illness, and deaths.



DWD Secretary Amy Pechacek and DWD Worker’s Compensation Division Administrator Steve Peters helped present awards at the Wisconsin Safety Council’s Corporate Safety Awards in April 2023.



## Unemployment Insurance Division (UI)

### *Mission*

To facilitate financial stability and a prosperous Wisconsin economy by delivering high quality, innovative, customer-driven unemployment services.

### *Program Summary*

The UI program is financed by federal and state taxes paid by employers who are subject to federal and state UI laws. In 1932, Wisconsin was the first state to enact a UI law to mitigate the adverse effects of the Great Depression. UI's primary roles are to provide:

- ▶ Temporary economic assistance to individuals who find themselves unemployed through no fault of their own and who are actively seeking work.
- ▶ Economic stability in the community during periods of economic downturn.

## Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)

### *Mission*

To obtain, maintain, and improve employment for people with disabilities by working with consumers, employers, and other partners. DVR serves:

- ▶ Individuals with disabilities, assisting them to maximize their employment opportunities by helping them develop the skills that today's businesses are seeking in the workforce of the future; and,
- ▶ Wisconsin businesses, offering employers access to a pool of qualified job candidates with disabilities and disability-related information and resources to help them meet their workforce needs.

### *Program Summary*

DVR is a federal/state program designed to obtain, maintain, and advance employment for people with disabilities by working with DVR consumers, employers, and other partners.

- ▶ DVR helps individuals with disabilities achieve their employment potential by providing services and supports to overcome employment barriers. Services to job seekers with disabilities include career guidance and counseling, job search and placement assistance, information and referral services, job supports, and vocational training.
- ▶ DVR works closely with Wisconsin employers, providing free assistance to help them recruit, hire, and retain workers with disabilities. This work is carried out by 12 DVR business services consultants positioned throughout the state. Services to businesses include recruitment of qualified candidates, retention strategies for employees with disabilities, access to financial incentives, accessibility assistance, and education related to disability and employment.



Project SEARCH interns on graduation day at ThedaCare Regional Medical Center, May 2022.

## Equal Rights Division (ERD)

### *Mission*

To protect the rights of all people in Wisconsin under the civil rights and labor standards laws we administer, to achieve compliance through education, outreach, and enforcement by empowered and committed employees, and to perform our responsibilities with reasonableness, efficiency, and fairness.

### *Program Summary*

One of the most productive fair employment practices agencies in the nation, ERD investigates, mediates, and adjudicates complaints under 40 different laws, including laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations, and the state's family and medical leave law. ERD also enforces laws pertaining to minimum wage, overtime pay, timely payment of wages, employment of minors, and notification of business closings or mass layoffs.



## Administrative Services Division (ASD)

### *Mission*

To provide strategic vision, leadership, and solutions with our business partners to empower clients and customers.

### *Program Summary*

ASD provides management and program support to DWD's divisions, including budget, facilities, finance, information technology, purchasing and procurement, lean government, project management services and solutions, and incident management and continuity of operations. In addition, ASD provides IT support to the Labor & Industry Review Commission, and batch monitoring support to the State of Wisconsin Investment Board and certain statewide programs administered by the Department of Health Services and the Department of Children and Families. ASD works closely with the Department of Administration and the Division of Personnel Management to deliver human resource services to the department.



## PROGRAMS, GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES as Outlined in DWD's 2023-25 Biennial Budget Request

### Program 1: Workforce Development

- ★ **Goal:** Provide job applicants with access to available jobs in Wisconsin.

**Objective/Activity:** Increase employers' access to available labor pools and job seekers' access to available jobs by increasing the number of job orders posted on [JobCenterofWisconsin.com](https://www.jobcenterofwisconsin.com).

- ★ **Goal:** Provide high school students with school-based and work-based instruction to assist them to directly enter the workforce with occupational skills needed by Wisconsin employers.

**Objective/Activity:** Increase the employability of high school graduates through youth apprenticeship.

- ★ **Goal:** Prepare individuals for skilled occupations through apprenticeship participation that combines on-the-job training, under the supervision of experienced journey workers, with related classroom instruction.

**Objective/Activity:** Improve access to quality training and family-supporting careers by increasing the number of new apprenticeship contracts each year through new program development and program expansion.

- ★ **Goal:** Maintain the efficiency of worker's compensation programs.

**Objective/Activity:** Monitor promptness of first indemnity payment of worker's compensation injury claims to ensure compliance with the performance standard that 80% of first indemnity payments are issued within 14 days of injury, as set forth under DWD 80.02(3)(a), Wis. Admin. Code.

- ★ **Goal:** Provide temporary economic assistance to Wisconsin's eligible unemployed workers and stabilize Wisconsin's economy by paying unemployment insurance benefits as quickly and accurately as possible.

**Objective/Activity:** First payment promptness for paying intrastate worker claims for unemployment insurance will meet or exceed the federal standard established by the secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor.

### Program 5: Vocational Rehabilitation Services

- ★ **Goal:** Obtain, maintain, and improve employment for people with disabilities by working with vocational rehabilitation consumers, employers, and other partners.

**Objective/Activity:** Provide high-quality employment preparation, assistive technology, and placement services to eligible individuals and improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

## Performance Measures

### 2021 AND 2022 GOALS WITH ACTUALS

Program Number	Performance Measure	2021		2022	
		Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual
1.	Number of new jobs posted on JobCenterofWisconsin.com.	360,000	373,550	378,000	451,941
1.	Number of students enrolled in Youth Apprenticeship program.	4,850	5,417	4,950	6,409
1.	Number of new registered apprentice contracts.	3,312 <sup>1</sup>	3,178	3,242 <sup>1</sup>	3,834
1.	Percentage of worker's compensation claims with first indemnity payments made within 14 days of injury.	80%	77%	80%	77%
1.	Federal performance metric for intrastate unemployment insurance first payment.	87%	55%	87%	81%
5.	Number of employment outcomes for job seekers with disabilities.	3,100	3,095	3,100	3,446

**Note:** Based on fiscal year.

<sup>1</sup>Goals for 2021 and 2022 have been revised.

### 2023, 2024 AND 2025 GOALS

Program Number	Performance Measure	Goal		
		2023	2024	2025
1.	Number of new jobs posted on www.JobCenterofWisconsin.com.	396,900	476,280	571,536
1.	Number of students enrolled in Youth Apprenticeship program.	5,050	5,150	5,255
1.	Number of new registered apprentice contracts.	3,9101	3,988	4,068
1.	Percentage of worker's compensation claims with first indemnity payments made within 14 days of injury.	80%	80%	80%
1.	Federal performance metric for intrastate unemployment insurance first payment.	87%	87%	87%
5.	Percentage of participants with disabilities who are in an education or training program and achieve measurable skill gains. <sup>2, 4</sup>	48.8%	50.8%	50.8%
5.	Percentage of participants with disabilities who are enrolled in an education or training program and attain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma (or recognized equivalent). <sup>3, 4</sup>	29%	33%	33%
5.	Number of employment outcomes for job seekers with disabilities.	3,200	3,200	3,200

**Note:** Based on fiscal year.

<sup>1</sup> Goals for 2023 have been revised.

<sup>2</sup> Includes participants who are enrolled in on-the-job training programs and customized trainings.

<sup>3</sup> Excludes participants who are enrolled in on-the-job training programs and customized trainings.

<sup>4</sup> Reflects new performance measures that correspond to two new objectives/activities for the 2023-25 biennium.



## Nonstandard and/or Flextime Schedules, Permanent Part-time Positions; and Other Alternative Work Patterns

Consistent with the findings of the Legislature and highlighted in Wis. Stat. s. 230.215(1)(1), the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) supports employment practices that provide flexibility in scheduling because those practices "often result in increased worker productivity, reduced absenteeism, improved employee morale and a more economical and efficient use of energy, highways and other transit systems." At the same time, promoting workforce participation through flexible work hours and locations provides DWD with a means of addressing the labor market quantity challenge – a shortage of workers driven by demographics decades in the making and fueled by the retirement of Baby Boomers and the gradual rise of employment barriers.

DWD recognizes that traditional full-time, in-person work patterns fail to meet the needs of many potentially productive citizens who, when offered some flexibility in their work schedules, are able to participate in the workforce. To capture the benefits of flexible work schedules and reach a greater pool of workers across the state, DWD has instituted policies that allow the use of nonstandard work schedules when the positions' roles can be performed with such flexibility. See, for example, DWD Policy 429 relating to hours of work and Policy 431, relating to telecommuting on a short- or long-term basis.

In applying these policies, DWD is pleased to report on its success in developing and creating flexible-time work schedules; additional, permanent part-time positions; and other alternative work patterns pursuant to s. 230.215(4), Wisconsin Statutes. In particular, DWD's rollout of its flexible telecommuting policy, last updated in November 2021, supports alternative work patterns while ensuring productivity, meeting customer needs, expanding recruitment opportunities, and strengthening retention activities.

Under DWD's Telecommuting Policy, supervisors evaluate two key factors to determine if and to what extent an employee may telecommute: (1) if the program's work and activities can be achieved in a remote or hybrid work environment, and (2) if the individual employee can complete their work in a remote or hybrid work environment. If a supervisor determines both factors can be met, the employee and the supervisor may enter into a telecommuting agreement.

These agreements may allow for partial remote work, such as one or two days per week. Up to 100% remote work is permitted under policy if the job can be performed both safely and satisfactorily remotely and if operations are not negatively impacted. DWD anticipates continuing to provide flexibility to its staff while effectively delivering efficient services to its customers and maintaining its operational needs.

### Snapshot Data

DWD had 1,487 employees on Sept. 18, 2023, including 204 who work in the office full time with no telecommuting agreement initiated or approved.

Remote				
100%	80%	60%	40%	20%
731	216	172	115	50

This table shows the number of DWD employees with telecommuting agreements in place as of Sept. 18, 2023, and their approximate percentage of hours spent teleworking weekly.

It should be noted the Department continues to maintain permanent part-time positions ranging from 50% FTE to 90% FTE. Position control records show DWD had 1,303 people in permanent full-time positions and 29 people in permanent part-time positions on March 31, 2022, and 1,338 people in permanent full-time positions and 22 people in permanent part-time positions on March 31, 2023.

Each DWD division tracked and monitored productivity levels as part of internal oversight, and divisions tracked and monitored various program metrics for federal and state funders. Funders provided additional program oversight with their own set of unique reporting requirements, and/or performance standards (e.g., Unemployment Insurance has adjudication and appeals timeliness standards that are set by the U.S. Department of Labor that are integrated into the performance metrics for adjudicators and administrative law judges).

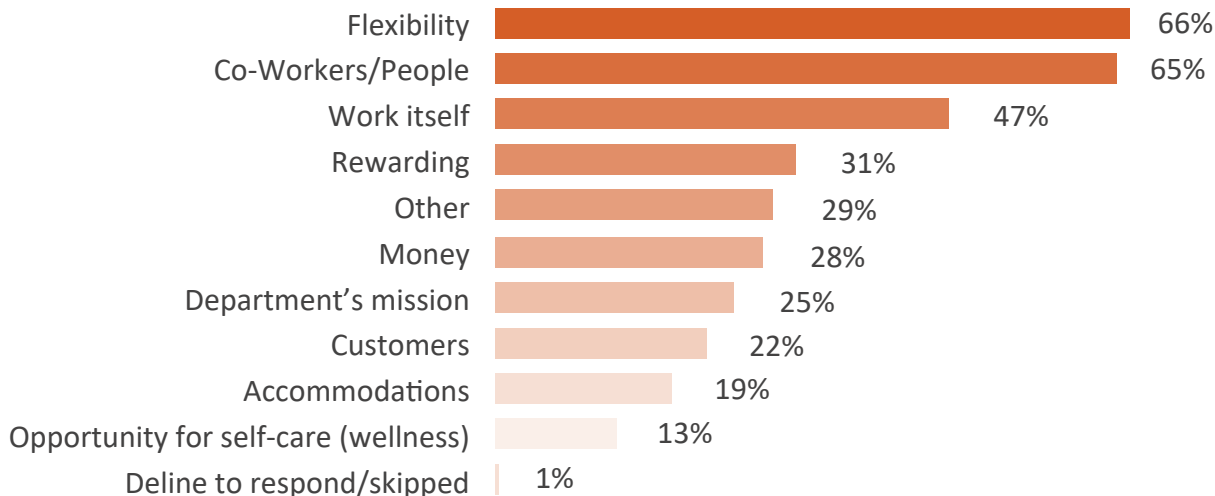
DWD has been able to meet established operational benchmarks while allowing flexibility in telecommuting. The Department has demonstrated relative consistency in productivity across the divisions since transitioning to a hybrid work environment. Examples of metrics captured and monitored include number of UI calls answered and completed by agents in DWD call centers, number of unemployment insurance claims adjudicated weekly, number of hearings held and cases closed by DWD administrative law judges, number of investigations completed by the Equal Rights Division, and number of cases closed by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Like other employers in Wisconsin, DWD faces a competitive labor market to staff the agency, including during the 2021-2023 biennium. Prior to the implementation of the flexible telecommuting policy, applicants were generally limited to the geographic area surrounding the position's assigned brick-and-mortar location. Flexible telecommuting has increased DWD's applicant pool, as reflected in the few examples listed below.

Position	Number of Applicants	
	Pre-Pandemic (In-person only listed)	Post-Pandemic (Remote option listed)
Records/Forms Management Specialist	77	219
Program and Policy Analyst Advisor	35	96
Attorney	22	74
Tax & Account Specialist	36	70

Because of DWD's work location flexibility, the agency was able to expand recruitment activities and retain workers who live outside of Madison or Milwaukee. DWD's offer of remote work allowed the agency to reach a more skilled and diverse applicant pool across the state and resulted in more applicants seeking employment for DWD positions.

Telecommuting has also contributed to DWD's ability to retain employees, as reflected in the agency's 2022 Stay Interview Survey, in which employees cited a flexible work environment as one of the top reasons that they stayed at DWD. These survey results are shared on page 13 of this report.



In summary, DWD has been and remains confident that its flexible telecommuting policy, and attention to productivity measures and supervisory practices, allows DWD to best serve and adapt to the state's evolving workforce and its needs. Through this policy, **DWD is fulfilling the Wisconsin Legislature's statutory intent that "all agencies of state government participate in developing and creating flexible-time work schedules, additional permanent part-time positions and other alternative work patterns in order to maximize, in a manner consistent with the needs of state service, the employment options available to existing and potential state employees." Wis. Stat. s. 230.215(1)(d).**

**“Welcome to the Workforce” Series Teaches Wisconsin Teens about Workplace Safety and Worker Rights**

In April 2022, DWD’s Equal Rights Division (ERD) launched the Welcome to the Workforce video series. This collection of videos featured teens discussing topics ranging from Youth Apprenticeship and working with a disability to workplace safety and what to do if harassed on the job. The videos were modeled after ERD’s popular 60-second videos and were tailored to high school audiences.

In 2023, Gov. Tony Evers declared April "Welcome to the Workforce Month" with a proclamation marking historic achievements in regulating child labor. ERD kicked off Welcome to the Workforce Month with a virtual panel discussion featuring representatives from the U.S. Department of Labor and Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Following the panel discussion, ERD partnered with community stakeholders to educate parents and students on minor worker rights and employers on their responsibilities when employing minors at events held throughout the state.



Matthew White, Director of the Bureau of Investigations in DWD’s Equal Rights Division, talks with parents and students about minor worker rights at a Welcome to the Workforce Month event in April 2023.

## 2021-23 Department Goals, Strategies, Activities, and Outcomes

The goals and strategies included in this section are from DWD's 2021-2023 Strategic Plan. Each goal includes strategies as well as highlights of DWD's success in carrying out each strategy.

### **Goal 1: All workers are treated fairly, with dignity and respect.**

#### ***Strategy 1.1: Integrate equity lens in decision making, including poverty and trauma-informed care training.***

Over the biennium, DWD demonstrated its commitment to integrating equity into decision making at all levels of the organization. Examples include:

- ▶ In 2022, all DWD staff were required to take Limited English Proficiency (LEP) training and DWD's policies were reviewed and modified to include gender neutral and inclusive language.
- ▶ DWD created a DEI Dashboard during the biennium to generate reports and analyze workforce data to strengthen the Department's diversity, equity, and inclusion approach.
- ▶ During the biennium, DWD's Division of Employment and Training incorporated DEI benchmarks into its discretionary grant programs, including Quality Jobs, Equity, Strategy and Training (QUEST) Disaster Recovery Dislocated Worker grants<sup>7</sup>, Support to Communities (STC) grants<sup>8</sup>, and Workforce Solutions Initiative grants, with a focus on people who were negatively impacted disproportionately by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ▶ DWD's Worker Connection program prioritized economic and racial equity by using an evidence-based approach in decision making. This was done by analyzing data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) to identify groups that were disproportionately disconnected from the workforce and demographic information to identify marginalized communities. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) demographic information was also used to identify underserved populations within Workforce Development Area (WDA) 2 and WDA 5. As a result of this analysis, Worker Connection identified populations for targeted outreach such as: individuals without a high school degree, long-term unemployed, minority men, single parents, people living in rural areas, and individuals experiencing homelessness.
- ▶ In February 2022, DWD's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) contracted with an outside entity to conduct a DEI needs assessment, which involved a thorough review of current data, staff survey results, policies, and interviews with DVR staff, consumers, and other stakeholders. The information helped inform the creation of DVR's DEI Action Plan, which generated goals and strategies focused on building a division-level structure for DEI work and supporting regional DEI planning and initiatives. The DEI Action Plan includes strategies aimed at building a system that fosters greater creativity, innovation, and speed in the process of addressing both equity and engagement. Future activities will include creating a consumer advisory board, capturing consumer feedback through better data collection, and hosting consumer listening sessions, among others.
- ▶ On Nov. 17, 2022, DWD supervisors attended a presentation on Resilient Wisconsin Trauma-Informed Practices and Upstream Prevention delivered by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) Trauma and Resilience Coordinator.



- ▶ DVR staff also received Trauma Informed Care (TIC) training from UW-Milwaukee through the Milwaukee Equity Action Plan (MEAP) during the biennium. The DVR MEAP committee meets regularly to review UW-Milwaukee's TIC training content and are working in coordination with the university to create online e-learning modules for DVR staff.
- ▶ In partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, DVR created a consumer quality improvement plan to enhance the culturally responsive and trauma-informed nature of DVR consumer services. A result of this led DVR to form communities of practice for counselors to identify and implement best practices to best support under-served populations and are partnering with UW-River Falls to develop a consumer satisfaction tool for collecting and evaluating real-time consumer feedback throughout the DVR process.
- ▶ DVR provides division staff with monthly training on various topics. Over the biennium, DVR held trainings on underserved populations including the LGBTQ+ community, Native American cultures, Black History Month, and the Hmong culture.

DWD received statewide recognition for these efforts. On Oct. 21, 2022, the State Council on Affirmative Action (SCAA) awarded DWD the 2022 Diversity Award for its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) recruitment and retention initiative.

#### DWD's Recruitment & Retention Activities Surrounding DEI Garner 2022 Diversity Award

DWD received statewide recognition for its robust efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. On Oct. 21, 2022, the State Council on Affirmative Action (SCAA) awarded DWD the 2022 Diversity Award for its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) recruitment and retention initiative. The SCAA established the Diversity Award in 2000 to recognize the achievements of outstanding affirmative action and equal employment opportunity practices among state agencies. The award recognizes state agencies, state technical colleges and University of Wisconsin System campuses for their strong commitment to the recruitment, retention and promotion of a diverse classified workforce as measured by the creation of programs, initiatives, and practices.

First Lady Kathy Evers, Gov. Tony Evers, and Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes look on as DWD Secretary Amy Pechacek and Deputy Secretary Pamela McGillivray celebrate with Personnel Management Bureau of Equity & Inclusion Director Laurice Lincoln at the state capitol. DWD was honored with the State Council on Affirmative Action's 2022 Diversity Award.



**Strategy 1.2: Improve public access to Job Center of Wisconsin resources to help minimize the length of time individuals remain unemployed.**

DWD successfully improved access to Job Center of Wisconsin resources during the biennium through several innovative projects and initiatives. Examples include:

- ▶ DWD implemented language support on Job Center of Wisconsin (JCW) during the biennium, supporting over 120 languages by the end of the reporting period. Additionally, DWD Administrative Services Division (ASD) staff updated JCW's Seeker Registration to identify and better serve Veterans via Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG).
- ▶ DWD merged the Case Manager Employment Planning Tool (CEPT) and Automated System Supporting Employment and Training (ASSET) applications during the biennium to allow for a more seamless experiences for users. As of June 30, 2023, individuals can access both platforms from a single log in.
- ▶ Significant updates were made to the Job Center of Wisconsin website during the biennium to make online resources more accessible for customers. Some of these updates included:
  - Updating the look and feel of resource information to make it easier for customers to access services.
  - Providing customers with the ability to schedule virtual meetings with DWD staff.
  - Providing customers with the ability to do live chat sessions with DWD staff.
  - Providing customers with the ability to do virtual chat sessions and co-browsing through eGain technology.
  - Providing customers with enhanced translation services (Translation 2.0 – English/Spanish Translation for Civil Rights Compliance (CRC) Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) pages, Translation 3.0 – Google Application Programming Interface (API) language translation, and Google Virtual Credit Card (VCC) – virtual meetings).

	2021	2022	2023
Total # of New Jobs Posted on JCW	734,349	1,089,830	900,549
Total # of virtual meetings scheduled	NA	288	527
Total # of virtual meetings attended	NA	219	398
Total # of live chat sessions (eGain)	NA	NA	532
Total # of Initial RESEA Sessions	11,902	8,183	9,466
Total # of Subsequent RESEA Sessions	NA	2,888	4,096

- ▶ DWD Worker Connection's unique targeted outreach approach connects traditionally underserved individuals to local job center resources. In addition, Career Navigators with the Worker Connection program help job seekers navigate employment and training resources, including job center resources.

- ▶ DWD's Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Outreach Specialists used Rapid Response mobile computer units during the reporting period to provide migrant and seasonal farmworkers access to Job Center of Wisconsin and its resources where farmworkers live and work.
- ▶ DWD worked with U.S. Department of Labor (US DOL) funding to expand access to reemployment services, including services through the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. Customers are now able to self-schedule into in-person and virtual reemployment services. Approximately 88% of the sessions scheduled are virtual sessions. This has significantly expanded access to these services, especially in rural areas.

**Strategy 1.3: Expand and enhance DWD's relationships with the public, stakeholders, and advocates for all programs.**

### WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS INITIATIVE

DWD led the implementation of Gov. Evers' \$158 million Workforce Solutions Initiative, which he announced in July 2021. The groundbreaking investment with American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding supports solutions to address the state's workforce needs and advance innovative pandemic recovery efforts. The initiative includes three main programs: The \$128 million Workforce Innovation Grants, the \$20 million Worker Advancement Initiative, and the \$10 million Worker Connection program.

This report includes examples of ways in which this initiative met other goals and strategies included in DWD's 2021-2023 Strategic Plan. Page 18 provides a summary of each component of the initiative.

#### Worker Advancement Initiative Serves Up Opportunity in Milwaukee

The Food Center Training program at Kinship Community Food Center offers trainees experiences that go far beyond the kitchen. Center Director Caitlin Cullen helped launch the first cohort of paid work experiences at Kinship's Food Center in early 2023 through Employ Milwaukee's Skillful Transitions program. Funded through a Worker Advancement Initiative (WAI) grant, the program allows participants to gain temporary work experience by learning the culinary and professional development skills they need to take the next step in their employment journey.

Orlando Pacheco started volunteering at Kinship when he first heard about the program. Soon after, he was enrolled in Skillful Transitions to start a paid work experience, where he honed his skills earning \$17 per hour. Orlando's story of perseverance and opportunity embodies the mission and goals of the Skillful Transitions program by empowering Milwaukee job seekers and their communities.

The Skillful Transitions program assists businesses and non-profit organizations like Kinship by funding wages for limited term jobs. Employ Milwaukee serves as the employer of record for participants, who may work up to 29 hours per week as part of the program.



Caitlin Cullen and Orlando Pacheco at Kinship Community Food Center in Milwaukee, April 2023.

### Workforce Innovation Grants

The Workforce Innovation Grant program provided up to \$10 million in individual grants for organizations to design and implement innovative plans to tackle their region's most pressing workforce challenges. Through June 30, 2023, DWD awarded 27 grants in partnership with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. The projects focus on improvements to child care, housing, transportation, and workforce training.

Collectively, Workforce Innovation Grants have reached or positively impacted close to 11,000 people through early June 2023.

### Worker Advancement Initiative

The state's 11 regional workforce development boards operate the Worker Advancement Initiative. This program provides training in several high-demand industries and occupations based on regional and local needs. Training opportunities span logistics/transportation, childcare/education, advanced manufacturing, construction/renewable energy, banking/financial services, and information technology. In addition, the grant provides wraparound services to ensure participants' financial needs are met while they're engaged in training. These include assistance with transportation, housing and child care, career planning and more.

During the biennium, the Worker Advancement Initiative program provided 16,403 services to 3,248 unique individuals, and provided 2,181 reskilling opportunities.

### Worker Connection

The Worker Connection program provides support for people who are re-engaging in the workforce post-pandemic in 11 counties including and around Milwaukee and Green Bay. Participating workers can expand career opportunities locally through Career Navigators, who connect workers with employers and other potential supports.

This program is designed to match job seekers with training and work opportunities in sectors with higher wages and demand. Targeted employment sectors include transportation, distribution and logistics, business and professional services, and information technology. The program incorporates evidence-based strategies such as the WorkAdvance training model, which has been shown to result in higher training completion rates, and placement in jobs with a wage premium and advancement opportunities.

The program had close to 1,600 participants as of June 2023.



- ▶ DWD's Equal Rights Division (ERD) strengthened its partnership with Wisconsin job centers and other agency stakeholders by updating its partner database and conducting stakeholder outreach through public presentations, including joint presentations with other divisions and with federal agencies, like Friday Fundamentals.
- ▶ ERD conducted two surveys of Job Center of Wisconsin (JCW) users this biennium to measure public awareness of its services and resources. The 2021 survey received 2,144 responses, while the follow up survey in 2022 was completed by 1,174 JCW users. From 2021 to 2022, public awareness of ERD services climbed from 38% to 62%. ERD also saw an 18% increase in 2022 for those who decided to contact the ERD regarding a labor standards or civil rights issue. In 2022 the survey also found a 13% decrease in respondents who did not contact ERD because they were unsure of who to contact.
- ▶ This biennium, ERD reaffirmed its commitment to expanding outreach and building awareness of its services with the expansion of its popular 60-Second Questions video library, covering a variety of topics, and Welcome to the Workforce video library, targeted to high schoolers. To help develop content for these resources, ERD provided flexibility to equal rights officers in managing their caseloads to make it easier for them to lend their expertise to developing these resources.
- ▶ ERD made dramatic customer-service improvements during the biennium through expanded web-based services and resources including:
  - Released an online civil rights complaint form to match the efficiency and accessibility of ERD's well-established labor standards online complaint form.
  - Created a public-facing online case portal providing parties and their legal representatives secure access to case information. This makes it easier for clients to navigate investigations and hearings and reduces staff time spent receiving and responding to information requests from parties.
  - Invested American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds into the development of and full transition to an online child labor work permit system. The system dramatically expanded accessibility of the work permit system to those living in rural areas or areas that are underserved.
  - Developed a robust online library of educational videos and related resources focused on helping clients navigate through services, including the investigation, mediation, and hearing processes.
  - Developed and rolled out the ERD Research Portal to expand access to key metrics and increase transparency. The online portal offers an illustrative look at division data, including mediation statistics, and complaints received by law, basis, and county. The portal helps employers, researchers, and policymakers gather information to inform activities to make Wisconsin a fair and just place for all people to work.
  - The upgrade and online availability of the newest ERD Decision Digest as a fully accessible, more user-friendly document that can be bookmarked and allows users to search the publication by word, phrase, or number.
- ▶ The DWD Worker's Compensation (WC) Division reported two decreases in the state's worker's compensation rates over the biennium, reflecting strong workplace safety practices in the state and providing Wisconsin employers with a competitive insurance marketplace for affordable and high-quality WC insurance coverage. Included was a 5.44% decrease in worker's compensation insurance rates starting Oct. 1, 2021, and an 8.47% decrease in worker's compensation insurance rates starting Oct. 1, 2022.

- ▶ WC continued to offer virtual training sessions to WC insurance practitioners, garnering registrations as high as 316 participants in 2022 from across the country.
- ▶ The Bureau of Workforce Information and Technical Support (BWITS) staff completed 1,903 tasks, projects, and presentations to stakeholders.

**Strategy 1.4: Treat DWD staff as career employees and critical stakeholders in the department's success.**

Throughout the biennium, DWD implemented projects across the agency demonstrating its commitment to providing DWD employees opportunities for professional development and to share their feedback on agency programs and initiatives. Examples include:

- ▶ DWD held Careers, Coffee, and Conversation Panel discussions on May 18, 2022, and Nov. 10, 2022. DWD employee panelists shared their career journeys with attendees and gave advice based on how they navigated their own career paths.
- ▶ DWD created the Leadership Challenge Mentor Experience to develop future leaders and increase their leadership skills. The pilot program started on Nov. 4, 2021. The size was limited to 10 participants (five mentees and five mentors) and concluded on Dec. 17, 2021. The first full DWD Leadership Challenge Mentor Experience took place March 2 through May 20, 2022, with a total of 23 participants (12 mentees and 11 mentors). Given overwhelmingly positive feedback from mentors and mentees alike, a second round began in May 2023 with 25 DWD staff participating (13 mentees and 12 mentors).
- ▶ DWD hired two Youth Apprentices in September 2022. One Youth Apprentice was hired in the DWD Administrative Services Division in the IT Solutions Center and the second was hired in the Division of Employment and Training as a webmaster.
- ▶ DWD's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) began encouraging supervisors to share local job openings division-wide to create transparency and encourage DVR staff to consider new or different employment opportunities within the division.
- ▶ Four DVR managers participated in the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute, an 11-month program that offers opportunities for current and future rehabilitation leaders across the nation to enrich their knowledge, skills, and understanding to meet the constantly changing needs and expectations of their consumers, employees, employers, and community partners.
- ▶ In partnership with Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute, DVR managers and supervisors earned educational credits taking part in a customized training to understand key principles of being a conscious, cultural, creative, inspirational, and collaborative leader.
- ▶ DVR offers monthly training for DVR staff related to changes or updates on best practices, resources, policy, caseload management, and other topics. The division held an all-staff conference in fall 2022 and began planning future training opportunities during the biennium related to state hiring procedures, interviewing tips, and resume and letter of qualification writing.
- ▶ The DWD Division of Employment and Training (DET) Administrator's Office held road shows in all 11 statewide workforce development areas during the biennium to meet with staff and discuss their questions, concerns, and ideas.
- ▶ DWD's Equal Rights Division (ERD) leadership helped develop and roll out a department-level program

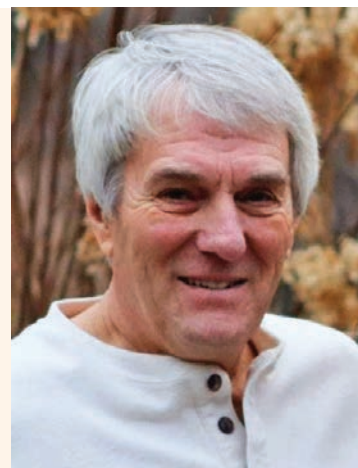
for conducting stay interviews during the biennium based on ERD's stay interviews program which began in 2019. Supervisors use the information gathered in stay interviews to shape career development plans and as feedback on their own performance. ERD uses the data collected to plan for future retirements and turnover. Stay interviews across the department have led to new approaches to team communication and training.

- ▶ DWD's Worker's Compensation Division (WC) implemented a staff-recommended initiative to digitize all incoming mail for Uninsured Employer's Fund investigators. This initiative allowed new mail to be destroyed after only six months and gave team members the ability to access correspondence remotely. Once implemented, this project opened the door to the digitization of older files, starting near the end of the biennium. By the end of the biennium, WC staff had digitized 30 drawers of files. In addition, 15 drawers of files past their required retention period were confidentially destroyed, and 25 drawers of files were archived to the State Record Center.
- ▶ WC began its Kofax Total Agility (KTA) Expansion during the biennium. This involved updating outgoing division documents with barcodes to be read by KTA to automatically index and route letters in our systems without user interaction. This project streamlined existing processes and saved staff time.

**Patrick Culbert Memorial Award Highlights Outstanding Customer Service in Worker's Compensation Division**

In the fourth quarter of 2021, the DWD Worker's Compensation Division launched the Patrick Culbert Memorial Award to honor the contributions and outstanding public service of Patrick Culbert, who worked for the state of Wisconsin for 49 years, including almost three decades in worker's compensation before passing away in 2021. Patrick helped make the division one of the strongest programs of its kind in the country, in part due to his expertise in communication, conflict resolution, and other customer service skills in the name of excellent public service.

This quarterly, nomination-driven award recognizes the contributions of career employees and sends a message to all employees that their hard work and dedication are valued.



▶ Patrick Culbert (1947-2021)



▶ DWD Deputy Secretary Pam McGillivray (right) and DWD Worker's Compensation Division Administrator Steve Peters (left) deliver the Patrick Culbert Memorial Award to WC Business Automation Specialist Laura Przybylo (center) in July 2022.

**Strategy 1.5: Advance a culture of employee engagement.**

- ▶ DWD created and distributed an employee engagement survey in January 2022 and another in early 2023.
  - The 2023 survey showed a significant increase in survey respondents compared to 2022 and showed growth in many areas of engagement, particularly in staff participation in career development opportunities.
  - Division engagement action plans were published in August 2022 highlighting each DWD division's plans to respond to areas of improvement identified in the January 2022 survey.
  - Individualized division employee engagement survey reports were created following the 2023 employee engagement survey highlighting the results from each division.
  - The department's Employee Engagement Lead met with DWD division leadership in June 2023 to present the data, share analysis, and discuss future plans to improve results. This process helped drive data-informed Engagement Action Plans for fiscal year 2023-2024.
- ▶ DWD conducted Stay Interviews in 2022, netting participation of 64% of DWD employees.
- ▶ DWD's Equal Rights Division (ERD) published a monthly newsletter with staff profiles, tech tips, and other relevant content designed to educate and engage division staff.
- ▶ ERD designated monthly Team Days in each of its two office locations during the biennium. On ERD Team Days, staff are encouraged to report to their headquartered offices and take part in planned events and trainings.
- ▶ In spring 2023, ERD held its first all-staff conference since 2019. The conference allowed staff who are partially remote to connect and engage as a team over educational offerings and training opportunities.
- ▶ DWD's Division of Employment and Training (DET) implemented a variety of initiatives and events to encourage employee engagement during the biennium. DET leadership held roadshows across the state to meet with staff in-person and discuss their questions, concerns, and ideas. DET also created a division newsletter, held communications focus groups, and implemented DET Bridges, an opportunity for staff to hear about other program and business areas, including major initiatives and staffing needs.
- ▶ Throughout the biennium, DWD's Worker's Compensation (WC) Division published a monthly division newsletter with staff-produced content including employee profiles, photos, and other content to engage staff.
- ▶ WC developed a quarterly peer-nominated award program as a memorial to a long-time WC employee who passed away in April 2021. Seven DWD staff were honored for excellence in performing their jobs through this program during the biennium.
- ▶ WC held seven quarterly hybrid all-division meetings during the biennium to share important division updates, showcase division successes and introduce new employees.
- ▶ In 2022, the WC Division implemented monthly coffee sessions with the Administrator and Continuous Improvement-Employee Engagement Team to meet informally with staff and talk about potential improvement and engagement activities.



## Goal 2: Employers, government, educational institutions, and workers collaborate to ensure workforce programs meet current and future needs.

### Strategy 2.1: Encourage and inform good community practices.

- Using funds provided through a competitive grant from the U.S. Department of Labor (US DOL), DWD developed a Community Based Organization (CBO) Toolkit to help CBOs provide better and more accurate information to their constituents related to Unemployment Insurance benefits. The toolkit will allow the department to reach many constituents who prefer contacting CBOs when they experience difficulties navigating within the UI system. DWD staff developed training for employees of such organizations during the biennium and has begun reaching out to various CBOs across the state.
- Over the biennium, DVR recognized 40 Wisconsin employers during National Disability Employment Awareness Month for their commitment to hiring people with disabilities. DVR's Business Services Consultants also provided over 15,000 services to more than 5,500 Wisconsin employers.

#### Marshfield Business Owner Receives Life-Changing Services from DVR

Clarence "Butch" Oertel felt a numbness in his leg when he was 30 years old. After undergoing back surgery and spending nearly a year in a body cast, he got back to work, but the numbness and pain returned. Working through the pain for years, Butch's doctor recommended he apply for services through DWD's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR).

In 2003, after careful business planning and services from DVR, Butch became the proud owner and sole proprietor of Butch's Service LLC in Marshfield. In Oct. 2021, Butch received the Exemplary Employer Award from Gov. Tony Evers as part of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which commemorates the many contributions of people with disabilities to America's workplaces and economy. "I don't need recognition or awards," Butch said. "If anything, I want DVR to be recognized for changing my life."

"For almost two decades, I have been able to have a successful business, support my family, and have sense of purpose – all because of DVR."



- ▶ DWD's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) began hosting virtual meetings with service providers during the biennium to ensure they have up-to-date information, understand DVR technical specifications and service agreement requirements, and have the opportunity to ask questions and gain clarity on best practices to effectively partner with DVR and better serve DVR job seekers.
- ▶ DVR began meeting with representatives from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP), the Easterseals Farm Program, and AgrAbility quarterly during the biennium to provide updates on DVR's Existing Business Policy that supports self-employed Wisconsin farmers. In addition, DVR collaborated with AgrAbility in September 2021 to provide a virtual four-part agricultural training to 90 DVR staff members. The training provided DVR with a better understanding of beef, crop, dairy, and organic farming, along with equipment safety. This partnership led to an in-person training in April 2022 when 25 DVR staff learned standard farming practices at the Marshfield Ag Research Station.

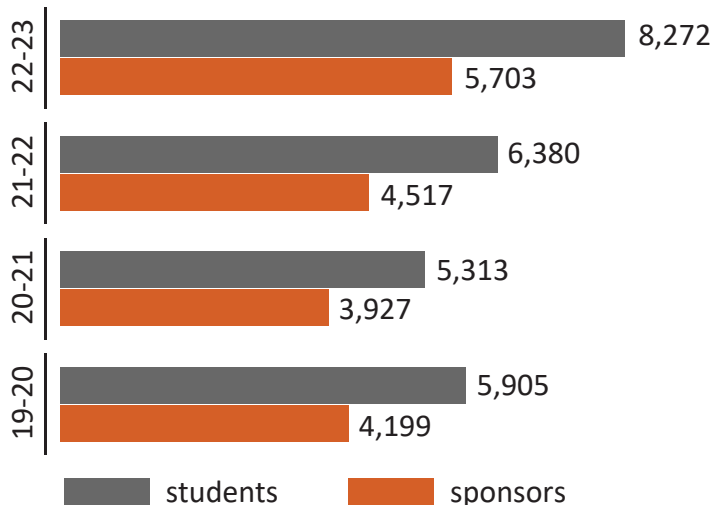


DWD Secretary Amy Pechacek promotes agricultural employment opportunities in collaboration with Wisconsin ag partners in spring 2023.

- ▶ The DWD Bureau of Information Technology Services Business Intelligence Team created over 40 new dashboards and reports during the biennium providing agency divisions:
  - Detailed information on performance and effectiveness of programs;
  - Increased accessibility to employment data;
  - Improved and in-depth access to financial, budget, and management reporting;
  - Enhanced capabilities and accessibility to visualizations; and
  - Automated and streamlined access to information for federal reporting requirements.
- ▶ During the biennium, the DWD Bureau of Information Technology Services Computer Platform Services Team successfully processed over 2.5 million batch jobs supporting over 40 critical systems that delivered benefits to residents and families across the state. The bureau made significant progress streamlining services and improving efficiencies by sunsetting aging technology, automating processes to provide greater insight into the availability of monitoring systems, and providing greater visibility into operational productivity.

**Strategy 2.2: Grow DWD's Youth Apprenticeship (YA) program.**

- ▶ Wisconsin saw record participation in the Youth Apprenticeship program during the biennium, growing from 11,218 student participants and 8,126 employer sponsors during the previous biennium (combined 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years) to 14,652 students and 10,220 sponsors over the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years.
- ▶ In addition, DWD's Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards launched new occupational pathways for Youth Apprenticeship during the biennium, including Business Administration and Education pathways.
- ▶ By June 2022, DWD completed a three-year process of modernizing all YA programs. In the process, 14 new occupational pathways were created, taking the total at that time to 75 distinct YA opportunities. By June 30, 2023, DWD had added four additional YA career pathways for a current total of 79.



**Strategy 2.3: Expand opportunities and increase participation in DWD Registered Apprenticeship programs.**

- ▶ In calendar year 2022, Wisconsin had a record-breaking 15,937 Registered Apprentices participating in the program. The number of new Registered Apprenticeship contracts, RA employer sites, and RA occupational pathways grew steadily over the biennium.

	Number of Registered Apprenticeship		
	New Contracts	Employer Sites	Occupations
FY 2021	3,186	2,882	168
FY 2022	4,006	2,918	173
FY 2023	4,871	2,966	180

- ▶ During the biennium, the DWD Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards developed the first Registered Nurse apprenticeship program in the Midwest. In spring 2023, the bureau officially announced the launch of the pilot program, with the first cohort of 16 Registered Nurse apprentices set to begin the program in fall 2023.
- ▶ DWD merged the Youth Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship online applications during the biennium to better administer the program and provide a more seamless experience for apprentices who start as youth and move into adulthood during their apprenticeship experience.



### **Goal 3: Every job provides the wages and benefits necessary to support workers' basic needs, invest in their future, and actively engage with their families and communities**

#### **Strategy 3.1: Increase access to employment offering family-supporting wages, affordable benefits, and flexibility.**

- ▶ Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, National Dislocated Worker Grants) provided reskilling opportunities to 6,373 unique individuals during the biennium.
- ▶ The DWD Bureau of Workforce Training (BWT) administers an Economic Self-Sufficiency calculator tool that is used when working with program participants to help identify what wage they need to earn to obtain economic self-sufficiency, based on their county of residence, household composition, and other factors. During the reporting period, BWT worked to update the dataset that powers the calculator tool.
- ▶ During the biennium ending June 30, 2023, the DWD Division of Employment and Training (DET) Office of Skills Development awarded grants including:
  - Approximately \$10 million in Wisconsin Fast Forward (WFF) grants to assist 72 workforce training projects with increasing high-demand job skills for more than 4,977 trainees at more than 56 businesses.
  - \$2 million in 64 WFF Technical Education Equipment grants to train 16,122 students in advanced manufacturing fields.
  - Approximately \$1 million to the University of Wisconsin System to promote and coordinate internships in high-demand fields throughout the state.
  - Approximately \$790,000 to the Wisconsin Technical College System Board to help reduce the waiting list for enrollment in courses and programs in high-demand fields for students.

#### **Wisconsin Fast Forward Supports Recruitment and Retention Solutions in Manitowoc**

One company that saw benefits from Wisconsin Fast Forward grant funds during the biennium was the Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry of Manitowoc. The company received nearly \$194,000 in WFF grants to train and hire entry level employees from diverse backgrounds.

"With the support of the Fast Forward grant, we have meaningfully improved our employee onboarding experience," said Sachin Shivaram, Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry CEO.

"In our new training center, employees learn the skills they need in a welcoming and safe environment. Improved employee retention has had a direct impact on the success of our business and our customers."



Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry CEO Sachin Shivaram takes DWD Secretary Amy Pechacek on a facility tour in September 2022.



- ▶ The DWD Worker's Compensation (WC) Division's Uninsured Employer Fund (UEF) team is responsible for ensuring all workers are covered for worker's compensation insurance and all employers are following the law. The funds collected by the UEF team from illegally uninsured employers are used to pay claim costs for workers who are injured while working for an employer not in compliance with the law.

Selected Uninsured Employer Fund Metrics	2021-23
Uninsured Employer Fund (UEF) June 30 Balance (end of biennium)	\$43.5 million
Completed employer investigations by UEF Staff	50,305
Payments through UEF on behalf of workers injured while working for illegally uninsured employers	\$4.5 million

- ▶ The UEF ended the biennium with a balance of \$43.5 million, an \$11.6 million increase over the past biennium, ensuring available resources to satisfy existing and future claims, thereby advancing both worker protections and quality customer service. The UEF team:
  - Assessed penalties on 5,167 employers for operating without worker's compensation insurance.
  - Collected penalty assessments of \$12.8 million from illegally uninsured employers.
  - Investigated and processed 60 claims for the Uninsured Employers Fund (UEF).
- ▶ Additionally, to advance worker protections, WC accomplished the following:
  - Monitored 162 private and 60 public self-insured Wisconsin employers as a part of its self-insurance program.
  - Approved three new wrap-up projects, or large construction projects with a single policy covering all contractors. Wrap-up projects are designed to provide a coordinated project safety program.
  - Calculated 14,721 Permanent Partial Disability (PPD) estimates for more than 13,200 litigated and non-litigated claims.
  - Received 260,496 electronic transmissions of claim-related information by users of the division's Pending Reports internet application, a secure login, real-time application for viewing work injury claim information and submitting required reports.
  - Reviewed 4,286 distinct work injury claims for the purposes of fulfilling the division's federal Medicare Secondary Payer Mandatory Reporting requirement as laid out in Section 111 of the Medicare, Medicaid, and SCHIP Extension Act (MMSEA) of 2007.
  - Received and processed 65,394 documents on non-litigated work injury claims through the Kofax Fax Importation application's electronic workflow.
  - Supported the Worker's Compensation Advisory Council and Health Care Provider Advisory Committee by proposing amendments to the law and to DWD 80 and 81 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code, promulgating administrative rules, and providing staff assistance for ad hoc and statutory committees.

Selected Claims Program Metrics	2021-23
Number of claims created for claim applications, third party agreements, and hearing loss	2,775
Judicial Orders Processed	9,467
Number of verified/processed litigated and non-litigated claims for wage information	10,595

Selected Legal Services Metrics	2021-23
Number of claims created for claim applications, third party agreements, and hearing loss	2,775
Judicial Orders Processed	9,467
Number of verified/processed litigated and non-litigated claims for wage information	10,595

- ▶ These combined efforts ensure that both workers and employers are treated fairly under the law. Additional activities from DWD's Equal Rights Division in improving access to employment by investigating and enforcing Wisconsin civil rights and employment law include:
  - ERD equal rights officers investigated 6,015 civil rights complaints during the biennium. These complaints included 5,018 on fair employment law, 203 on family and medical leave law, 498 on fair housing, 168 on public accommodations, and 95 on health care retaliation. In over 575 of those cases, ERD investigators found probable cause to believe the law had been violated.
  - Nearly 2,000 civil rights complaints were certified to hearing during the biennium. Parties voluntarily agreed to prehearing mediation before ERD Administrative Law Judges in 999 of those cases. Of those mediations, 62% resulted in settlement.
  - Officers investigated over 4,600 labor standards complaints, more than 3,600 of which involved claims for owed wages.
  - Through ERD's investigation and enforcement, the division was able to collect over \$3 million in wages owed to Wisconsin workers.

**Strategy 3.2: Improve employment outcomes for formerly incarcerated individuals.**

DWD and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) collaborated successfully during the biennium. As of June 30, 2023, DWD and DOC operate 11 job centers in Wisconsin correctional facilities.

- ▶ DWD and DOC continue to expand this program and are now working to add Job Center of Wisconsin-enabled computers to Community Corrections locations to enable formerly incarcerated individuals to have more access to workforce resources as they seek employment.
- ▶ The table to the right shows a steady increase over the biennium in the number of people served in Wisconsin's 11 correctional job centers.

Program Fiscal Year	Distinct ASSET Account PINs
2019	4
2020	47
2021	225
2022	909
2023	1,444

- ▶ During the biennium, DWD's Office of Veterans Employment Services (OVES) established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) to ensure employment, training, and benefits are provided to incarcerated veterans prior to their release or upon placement in DOC community supervision. Once appropriate veterans are identified by DOC, OVES staff visit correctional facilities and provide assessments and individualized career services. During the two-year period ending June 30, 2023, OVES exceeded all negotiated performance measures set by the U.S. Department of Labor Veteran Employment and Training, serving 1,775 veterans identified with significant barriers to employment, including 207 justice-involved veterans.

Gov. Evers' Workforce Solutions Initiative is supporting several efforts around justice-involved individuals. Examples include:

- ▶ A Workforce Innovation Grant to the University of Wisconsin-Madison is supporting the Prison Education Initiative. This \$5.6 million grant will result in the establishment of a uniform digital learning management system that can be used by all training providers operating prison-based education systems in Wisconsin correctional institutions, the development of associate and bachelor's degree programs to be delivered to persons in DOC's care, and the development of several digital badge programs. The program will also provide training in these programs to 300 incarcerated individuals by June 30, 2025.
- ▶ Worker Connection's partnership with correctional institutions and community-based organizations that work with justice-involved individuals has resulted in significant enrollment in the program. During the period of March 1, 2022 (when Worker Connection began enrollment) through June 30, 2023, 325 clients had a record of arrest or conviction.

**Strategy 3.3: Improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities.**

During the biennium, DWD's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) successfully improved employment outcomes for thousands of Wisconsinites with disabilities. DVR achieved this by providing comprehensive employment services including:

- ▶ Career guidance and counseling.
- ▶ Disability and employment assessment.
- ▶ Vocational and other training.
- ▶ Job search and placement assistance.
- ▶ Information and referral services.
- ▶ Pre-employment transition services for students ages 14 to 21.<sup>9</sup>
- ▶ Employment service support for individuals with significant disabilities.<sup>10,11</sup>

Between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2023:

- ▶ 6,570 DVR consumers were successfully connected with employment and maintained their employment for at least 90 days, resulting in successful closure of their DVR case. In the previous biennium, 6,546 such DVR consumer cases were closed successfully.
- ▶ Individuals with disabilities connected to employment through DVR received wages averaging \$16.71 per hour. In the previous biennium, the average wage for DVR consumers was \$14.52 per hour.
- ▶ DVR had 21,938 new applicants for DVR services and found 19,364 individuals eligible for services. In the previous biennium, DVR had 18,919 new applicants and found 17,663 individuals eligible for DVR services.

These figures show DVR's consistent improvement over the biennium in connecting people with disabilities to quality employment opportunities in Wisconsin. Additional DVR projects and initiatives during the biennium to improve employment outcomes for Wisconsin residents with disabilities include:

- ▶ **Customer Service and Rapid Engagement:** In 2023, DVR revamped its standards to ensure the division is providing efficient, high-quality customer services that supports job seekers to achieve their employment goals. As part of this focus, DVR partnered with Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute, which led one of three mandatory trainings aimed at understanding best practices for providing effective and efficient customer service experiences.
- ▶ **Career Pathways Advancement Initiative Grant:** In Spring 2021, DVR received a five-year, \$14 million Career Pathways Advancement (CPA) Initiative grant from the U.S. Department of Education. DVR was given five years to enroll 500 individuals with disabilities into the grant program and reached this goal in less than two years. CPA Initiative participants have received additional resources and opportunities during the biennium to advance in a career in healthcare, digital/information technology, construction, or manufacturing.
- ▶ **Local Outreach:** DVR staff outreach and engagement with schools and underserved communities has led to an increase of approximately 1,400 new applicants in Program Year 2022, compared to Program Year 2021. This helps ensure individuals with disabilities have access to apply and participate in DVR services to help them secure self-supporting employment.



- ▶ Project SEARCH: Over the biennium, Project SEARCH graduated over 350 individuals with disabilities who spent nine months learning new work and personal skills to prepare them for employment.<sup>12</sup>
- ▶ Transition Action Guide: In August 2022, DVR launched a digital Transition Action Guide website developed in collaboration with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Department of Health Services (DHS) Division of Medicaid Services (DMS) and Division of Care and Treatment Services (DCTS). The online resource is a simple guide with best practices and technical assistance to support the transition for youth with disabilities from school to adulthood.
- ▶ Training Grants: DVR's Training Grant policy supports eligible job seekers with disabilities with financial support to attend a university, technical college, or vocational training programs that offers federal financial aid. Over the biennium, DVR provided nearly 2,000 training grants totaling more than \$4.3 million.
- ▶ IRIS System Updates: DWD's Administrative Services Division (ASD) assisted DVR in updating its IRIS system, which securely stores DVR consumer information, to be responsive to new federal guidelines and employer requirements. Automating new processes in IRIS allowed DVR staff and service providers to serve consumers with disabilities more quickly and efficiently during the biennium.

DWD also successfully provided employment services to Wisconsin veterans with disabilities during the biennium.

- ▶ If a veteran leaves the military with a significant disability, they may receive education and training through the VA Vocational Rehabilitation (VR&E) program. When a veteran reaches the end of a VR&E training, DWD Office of Veterans Employment Service (OVES) staff conduct a comprehensive assessment, develop an individual employment plan, and assist the veteran using a case management process to help the veteran re-enter the workforce.
- ▶ During the two-year period ending June 30, 2023, OVES exceeded all negotiated performance measures set by the U.S. Department of Labor Veteran Employment and Training, serving 1,775 veterans identified with significant barriers to employment, including over 900 disabled veterans.

Gov. Evers' Workforce Solutions Initiative is supporting several efforts around employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Examples include:

- ▶ An \$8.9 million Workforce Innovation Grant was awarded in June 2022 to the Down Syndrome Association of Wisconsin will help overcome barriers to employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This grant is working to enhance the online "Think Ability Wisconsin Center" to deliver virtual education options for individuals with disabilities and their families. The project is also working to educate about employers about this underutilized labor resource and the benefits of hiring a neurodiverse workforce. This project will serve 5,500 individuals and 60 employers by June 30, 2025.
- ▶ The Worker Connection program enrollment of individuals with disabilities is a byproduct of the partnerships established with community-based organizations such as libraries, shelters, and recovery organizations. During the period of March 1, 2022 (when Worker Connection began enrollment) through June 30, 2023, 177 clients enrolled had a self-reported disability.

## **Goal 4: Deliver high quality, innovative, customer-driven unemployment services while improving UI claimant experience.**

### **Strategy 4.1: Find and implement efficiencies to improve customer service and timeliness.**

In summer 2021, Wisconsin was one of the first states to proactively apply for technical assistance through the U.S. Department of Labor's (US DOL) Tiger Team<sup>13</sup> to help the UI program identify and fund additional process improvements that speed benefit delivery, address equity, and fight fraud. The Tiger Team (a team of specialists who address specific goals or problems) assessed Wisconsin's systems and processes and worked with UI staff to develop short-term project ideas. Examples of the Tiger Team's work during the biennium include:

- ▶ An audit of DWD internet pages and claimant portal to ensure that these sites are accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- ▶ Completion of a Behavioral Insight analysis to identify ways to make UI forms and other communications easier to understand.
- ▶ Translation of all documents and the UI claimant portal into Spanish and working with US DOL to identify other projects that will assist non-English speaking customers.<sup>14,15</sup>
- ▶ Projects related to fraud prevention, including:
  - An Identification Proofing solution.
  - Participation in the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) Integrity Data Hub (a unique secure multistate data system which contains significant cross-matching capability).
  - Development of a knowledge base tool that assists internal staff in finding relevant UI resources quickly.

In fall 2021, UI started moving Call Center activities to a cloud-based software called Nice In-Contact. This allows flexibility in customer interactions and provides functionality in workforce management and quality control. This solution is both scalable and flexible to address the ever-changing needs of a government program. The NICE CXone platform enhances the current DWD system with additional benefits:

- ▶ Modern web-based call delivery system that allows agents to work wherever they have an internet connection, providing greater flexibility for agents in taking and responding to calls.
- ▶ Scalability of solution in real time to address changing demands (both up and down).
- ▶ Omnichannel approach that allows DWD to introduce other communication channels (e.g., chat, text messaging).
- ▶ Improved ability to monitor interactions with customers.
- ▶ Enhanced real-time reporting, including number of unique callers.

In early 2022, DWD integrated the JobCenterOfWisconsin.com online chatbot, Mattie Moo, with UI to assist individuals filing claims and seeking other assistance. This allowed users to gain access to vital information more quickly and get their questions answered in real-time. Mattie Moo was implemented on key UI Internet webpages and is available in English, Spanish and Hmong.

UI made additional enhancements to make it easier to file for UI benefits by updating the language for both the initial and weekly UI claim applications. These applications now feature "plain language" as much as possible. The claimant portal was further enhanced in April 2023 with an improved payment bank interface within the UI claimant portal. The new bank interface allowed customers to easily correct overpayments in English or Spanish.

DWD updated the UI Claimant Handbook in 2022, including a redesign to make it easier for claimants to read and understand. The changes included adding pictures and links, updating the layout, and using plain language over UI jargon.

A Demographic Masking project, funded by a \$6.84 million Equity Grant DWD was awarded in summer 2022 by US DOL, was completed in December of that year. This project was designed to protect claimants from unconscious bias in the handling of their cases by preventing workers and adjudicators from seeing demographic data that might unintentionally affect decisions.

#### **Strategy 4.2: Implement Misclassification Task Force findings.**

Gov. Evers' Joint Task Force on Worker Misclassification and Payroll Fraud, which he created in 2019 and was administered by DWD, issued a slate of recommendations to combat worker misclassification in its 2020 report. One recommendation – to educate workers and employers on the rules, requirements, and penalties associated with worker misclassification – was implemented through the work of DWD's Equal Rights Division (ERD). The division continued efforts to redesign and improve website content about worker misclassification during the biennium, augmenting previous work to design a poster and flyer and conduct a survey. DWD continued administering the joint task force activities during the biennium, including development and issuance of the group's 2022 report.

DWD's UI Division continued to take an active role in the Interagency Coordinated Enforcement Team that was recommended in the task force's 2020 report and met quarterly to review cases and strategies to work together with other divisions and partners at the Department of Revenue and the Department of Justice to ferret out worker misclassification, to investigate it, and to prosecute it.

UI hired three new investigators in the Bureau of Legal Affairs during the biennium to investigate criminal cases of benefit fraud and worker misclassification.

The UI Division Bureau of Legal Affairs' Program Integrity and Worker Classification Section educated workers and employers when conducting field investigations by responding to complaints and inquiries through the misclassification website and through various outreach efforts, including:

- ▶ Bureau of Legal Affairs Director Janell Knutson and Worker Classification Section Chief Mike Myszewski authored an article about worker classification for the Wisconsin Institute of CPA's magazine's March 2023 edition.
- ▶ The Worker Classification Section Chief participated in a joint presentation with the Department of Revenue related to misclassification for the Wisconsin AFL-CIO in February 2023.

The Worker's Compensation Division and Unemployment Insurance Division included several task force recommendations in their department proposals to their respective advisory councils as part of the agreed-bill process for recommended legislative changes.

**Strategy 4.3: Pursue other opportunities to support proper classification of Wisconsin workers.**

In addition to the efforts of Gov. Evers' Joint Task Force on Worker Misclassification and Payroll Fraud, DWD pursued opportunities to support proper worker classification in Wisconsin, including:

- ▶ The UI Division Bureau of Legal Affairs' Worker Classification Section conducted a Friday Fundamentals webinar and a Labor Law Clinic on the topic, reaching attorneys and other attendees statewide.
- ▶ DWD Worker's Compensation (WC) Division Uninsured Employers Fund (UEF) investigators continued to review worker classifications and educate employers as a part of the investigation process and made efforts to share information across departments including with UI to support proper worker classification.

The Worker's Compensation Division and Unemployment Insurance Division included several task force recommendations in their department proposals to their respective advisory councils as part of the agreed-bill process for recommended legislative changes.



Gov. Tony Evers checks in with the young chefs who designed cookies as part of Take Your Child to Work Day: The DWD Cookie Factory in April 2022. DWD staff members brought their children to GEF 1 for hands-on experience on how to hire and train employees, provide a safe workplace, connect with customers, and, of course, how to make delicious products!



Aspiring entrepreneurs take on the challenge of creating the next DWD Cookie Factory sensation, while proud DWD parents and staff lend helping hands during an April event for Take Your Child to Work Day. The event was among the agency's employee engagement efforts during 2022.





**Strategy 4.4: Continue to move forward on UI System Modernization.**

In September 2021, DWD contracted with Madison-based Flexion to embark on an unprecedented four-year modernization of the UI system, upgrading the COBOL-based mainframe system to a cloud-based flexible system able to nimbly adapt to changes in demands on the agency and in program requirements. Considering all elements of the system, including call center modernization, efforts to address support outside of business hours, IT infrastructure costs (cloud services, code repository, etc.), licensing to support the effort, change management needs, and other resources that may be needed to support the effort, anticipated costs are projected at up to \$80 million, paid for through federal funds.

At its conclusion, the project will entirely replace the existing, antiquated mainframe, providing end-to-end services to DWD customers (both claimants and employers) in a timely manner. DWD staff will be able to administer programs inclusively and efficiently, with modern online tools. Important advances made during the biennium include:

- ▶ Establishment of a secure, cloud-based infrastructure that is modern, secure, and flexible enough to meet the changing demands of the UI program going forward.
- ▶ Development of a benefit calculation and liability engine. DWD has prioritized replacing manual processes with automated processes. Some of the least efficient processes within the legacy system include determining whether a claimant meets the criteria for benefits, the amount of the benefits, and the charging associated with those benefits. These determinations are some of the most complicated components of the legacy system. Initial work was focused on the establishment of the foundational calculations that determine both the benefit amount and the applicable employer's share of that benefit amount. The vast majority of these core calculations were completed during the biennium.
- ▶ Updated user interface of modern calculations and outcomes. In 2023, the first fully operational staff internal webpage was developed in the modern system. Staff are now able to view calculations on the modern system for validating calculations in the legacy system. This validation is the most critical step toward ensuring confidence in the results of the modern system. Staff who participated in internal webpage demonstrations were enthusiastic about the ease with which they could navigate the page, find information, and ultimately, make determinations. The new interface's benefits include:
  - A clean, intuitive interface that is user friendly; any computer user can navigate it without special training. In the legacy system, staff undergo a considerable amount of training just to learn how to navigate the system using function keys.
  - Critical data is summarized and displayed in a clean and concise format on a single staff internal webpage, including data that is not currently included in the legacy system.
  - Navigating from that same staff internal webpage, users have the option to select and view pertinent detailed data from a link on the page. In the legacy system, information is displayed in a convoluted manner, often requiring DWD staff to manually visit multiple screens (without an internal link) to find the pertinent information. Acronyms and UI jargon are replaced by plain language.
- ▶ Completion of a validation mechanism. The project team completed implementation of a fully functional mechanism to compare modern calculation results to the legacy system. Part of the validation process included identifying and assessing mismatches between the modern and legacy systems to determine the accuracy of changes to the calculations in the modern system. This is part of the agile development process.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The Registered Apprenticeship Program is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 57% of the Registered Apprenticeship Program is financed with federal funds, and 43% is funded by other sources.
- <sup>2</sup> The Workforce Solutions Initiative is being supported, in whole or in part, by federal award number SLFRP0135 awarded to the Department of Workforce Development via the Wisconsin Department of Administration by the U.S. Department of the Treasury.
- <sup>3</sup> The Wisconsin Vocational Rehabilitation Program is supported by the U.S. Department of Education. A total of 78.7% the Wisconsin Vocational Rehabilitation Program is financed with federal funds, and 21.3% is funded by other sources.
- <sup>4</sup> The Career Pathways Program is supported by the U.S. Department of Education. A total of 100% of the Career Pathways Program is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>5</sup> The UI Administration Program is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the UI Administration Program is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>6</sup> The Job Service Program is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the Job Service Program is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>7</sup> The QUEST Grant is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the QUEST Grant is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>8</sup> The Support to Communities Program is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the Support to Communities Program is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>9</sup> Pre-Employment Transition Services are supported by the U.S. Department of Education. A total of 100% of the Pre-Employment Transition Services are financed with federal funds.
- <sup>10</sup> Supported Employment Services for Adults with Disabilities are supported by the U.S. Department of Education. A total of 100% of Supported Employment Services for Adults with Disabilities are financed with federal funds.
- <sup>11</sup> Supported Employment Services for Youth with Disabilities are supported by the U.S. Department of Education. A total of 90% of Supported Employment Services for Youth with Disabilities are financed with federal funds, and 10% is funded by other sources.
- <sup>12</sup> The Project SEACH program is supported by the U.S. Department of Education. A total of 93% of the Project SEACH program is financed with federal funds, and 7% is funded by other sources.
- <sup>13</sup> The Tiger Team grant is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the Tiger Team grant is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>14</sup> The Equity Grant is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the Equity Grant is financed with federal funds.
- <sup>15</sup> The Navigator Grant is supported by the U.S. Department of Labor. A total of 100% of the Navigator Grant is financed with federal funds.



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