

ACRM APPAUDS CONGRESSIONAL ACTION MAKING MAJOR CHANGES TO FEDERAL LAW AUTHORIZING DISABILITY AND REHABILITATION RESEARCH

On July 22, 2014, President Obama signed into law [Public Law No. 113-128] the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#) (WIOA). The legislation includes significant changes to Title II of the Rehabilitation Act pertaining to the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) and the Interagency Committee on Disability Research (ICDR). Many of the amendments included in the legislation were proposed in the past by ACRM and others in the medical rehabilitation community. ACRM applauds congressional efforts to elevate the stature and visibility of disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research; emphasize the dissemination of research findings to clarify research implications for policy and practice; and provide for a government-wide strategic plan for disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research.

NIDRR NAME CHANGE.

The legislation strikes the current name of the Institute (National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research) and inserts a new name—the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR).

RELOCATION.

Currently NIDRR is located in the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services of the Department of Education. Under the legislation, the Institute is relocated to the Administration for Community Living of the Department of Health and Human Services. The relocation is effective on the date of enactment, however the bill provides for an orderly transition “for such period of time as may reasonably be needed to facilitate the orderly implementation of [the relocation].” ACRM believes that NIDILRR’s relocation to HHS has the potential of increasing the impact of NIDILRR-supported health and function research on improving our Nation’s health care policy for people with disabilities and chronic conditions.

GENERAL STRATEGIES.

In addition to research and training, the legislation focuses on knowledge translation by adding several references to “technical assistance” and “dissemination of information that clarifies research implications for policy and practice” (including the “practical implications of research outcomes and anticipated next steps”), and taking “what action is necessary to keep Congress fully and currently informed.”

CHAIR OF ICDR.

Under current law, the NIDRR director is chair of the Interagency Committee on Disability Research. Under the legislation, the chair is elevated to the Secretary of HHS or the Secretary’s designee, which may be the director of NIDILRR.

ICDR—COMPREHENSIVE GOVERNMENT-WIDE STRATEGIC PLAN.

The legislation directs the ICDR to develop a comprehensive government wide strategic plan for disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research. ACRM has been advocating for this critical provision for many years.

The strategic plan must include, at a minimum:

- a description of the—
 - measurable goals and objectives;
 - existing resources each agency will devote to carrying out the plan;
 - timetables for completing the projects outlined in the plan; and
 - assignment of responsible individuals and agencies for carrying out the research activities;
- research priorities and recommendations;
- a description of how funds from each agency will be combined, as appropriate, for projects administered among Federal agencies, and how such funds will be administered;
- the development and ongoing maintenance of a searchable government wide inventory of disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research for trend and data analysis across Federal agencies;
- guiding principles, policies, and procedures, consistent with the best research practices available, for conducting and administering disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research across Federal agencies; and
- a summary of underemphasized and duplicative areas of research.

The strategic plan must be submitted to the President and the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the Senate and the Committee on Education and the Workforce of the House of Representatives.

The annual report prepared by ICDR must, among other things, describe the progress made in implementing the strategic plan, including progress toward implementing the elements described above and detailed budget information.

SUMMARY

In sum, the amendments to Title II of the Rehabilitation Act pertaining to NIDILRR and ICDR have the potential of improving the quality of life of people with disabilities and chronic conditions by enhancing the stature and visibility of disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research. The success of NIDILRR and ICDR is dependent on:

- the efforts of NIDILRR staff;
- the support of HHS leadership;
- the commitment of all Federal research agencies to the ICDR planning and implementation process;

- the active participation of people with disability, their families and advocates, and the healthcare and research communities to ensure the ICDR strategic plan reflects the priorities of all stakeholders;
- the training of disability, independent living, and rehabilitation researchers, the advancement of their methods, and the acceleration of their research; and
- Congressional action to provide the authority and funding to achieve these goals.

NIDRR's move from the Department of Education to Health and Human Services stems in part from the work of ACRM's Research Policy & Legislation Committee, ACRM's policy and legislative counsel, PPSV, and the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Coalition (DRRC), of which ACRM is a lead organization. This outcome illustrates yet once again how ACRM membership provides important benefits.

ACRM's focus during the coming years will be to ensure that the promises of this legislation become a reality. And we will continue our advocacy for improvements to the rehabilitation research portfolio at NIH.