

Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

2020 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment



**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
& WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

A Proud Partner of the Alaska Job Center Network

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Introduction

The Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (AKDVR), as part of the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD), is responsible for the administration and operation of Alaska's public vocational rehabilitation program. While AKDVR continually assesses its performance and the needs of Alaskans with disabilities, the Rehabilitation Act, as amended, Public Law 99-506 Section 101(a), requires each state vocational rehabilitation agency conduct a comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) jointly with the Statewide Vocational Rehabilitation Committee (SVRC) triennially. The results of the CSNA are used to develop goals, priorities, strategies, and actions for both AKDVR's Strategic and Combined State Plans.

In order to meet the requirements of 34 CFR §361.29, the CSNA must address the following:

- What are the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing in Alaska, particularly the vocational rehabilitation services needs of:
- Individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;
- Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program;
- Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce development system as identified by those individuals and personnel assisting those individuals through the components of the system and;
- Youth with disabilities, and students with disabilities, including;
- Their needs for pre-employment transition services or other transition services; and
- An assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services provided are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in order to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities.
- An assessment of the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) within the state.

Multiple data sources were used to obtain the information to answer the aforementioned questions, including surveys; a review of local and statewide studies focusing on services and barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities; reports generated by the State of Alaska Research & Analysis Division, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, State of Alaska Senior and Disabilities Services; U.S. Census Bureau data, and the AKDVR Case management software, AWARE.

Most Significantly Disabled

1. What are the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing in Alaska, particularly the vocational rehabilitation services needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services.
 - a. Long-term supports continue to be a challenge in the state of Alaska, due to geography, availability of health providers, services, and lack of funding for long term supports.
 - b. The State of Alaska has historically experienced basic health care and health care facility shortages throughout the state. Annotated in the map in Figure 1, the most populated areas of Alaska, including Anchorage, Palmer, Wasilla, Fairbanks, Juneau, Kenai, and Kodiak, have a high number of individuals receiving services through the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) Medicaid waiver, with large portions of the state having no waivers. For individuals with a complex plan of care living in rural areas, services or providers may not exist, and they may be required to relocate to an area that has such services.
 - c. As of June 30, 2018 the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services had restricted the issuance of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) Medicaid waiver to 50 new waivers granted annually, with no more than 600 total enrollees per year. Currently, 836 individuals on the IDD Medicaid waiver waiting list have been on it for 90 days or more.¹
 - d. As of SFY 2018, the average length of time individuals spend on the IDD Medicaid waitlist was 40.6 months.
 - e. For AKDVR participants who are most severely disabled (MSD), some may require supported employment (SE) services to ensure success with long-term supports. SE cases can be very complex and involve a team of providers who work with the individual and AKDVR.
 - f. The American Communities Survey data for Alaskans for 2017, showed an estimated increase of 2.9% in the number of individuals with disabilities from 2016 to 2017. Based on projected data, this upward trend will most likely continue. As Alaska's population is aging, those over 65 are projected to represent close to 20% of the state's population by 2025.² This could impact the availability of healthcare services for people with disabilities.

¹ Individual with Developmental Disabilities Registration and Review Report, Fiscal Year 2018, published by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Senior and Disabilities Services.

² June 2017 Alaska Trends Magazine, Published by State of Alaska, Department of Labor, article by Eddie Hunsinger.

Map has the 2018 population figures by zip code in green shading. This highlights the large geographical areas that are sparsely populated in the state.

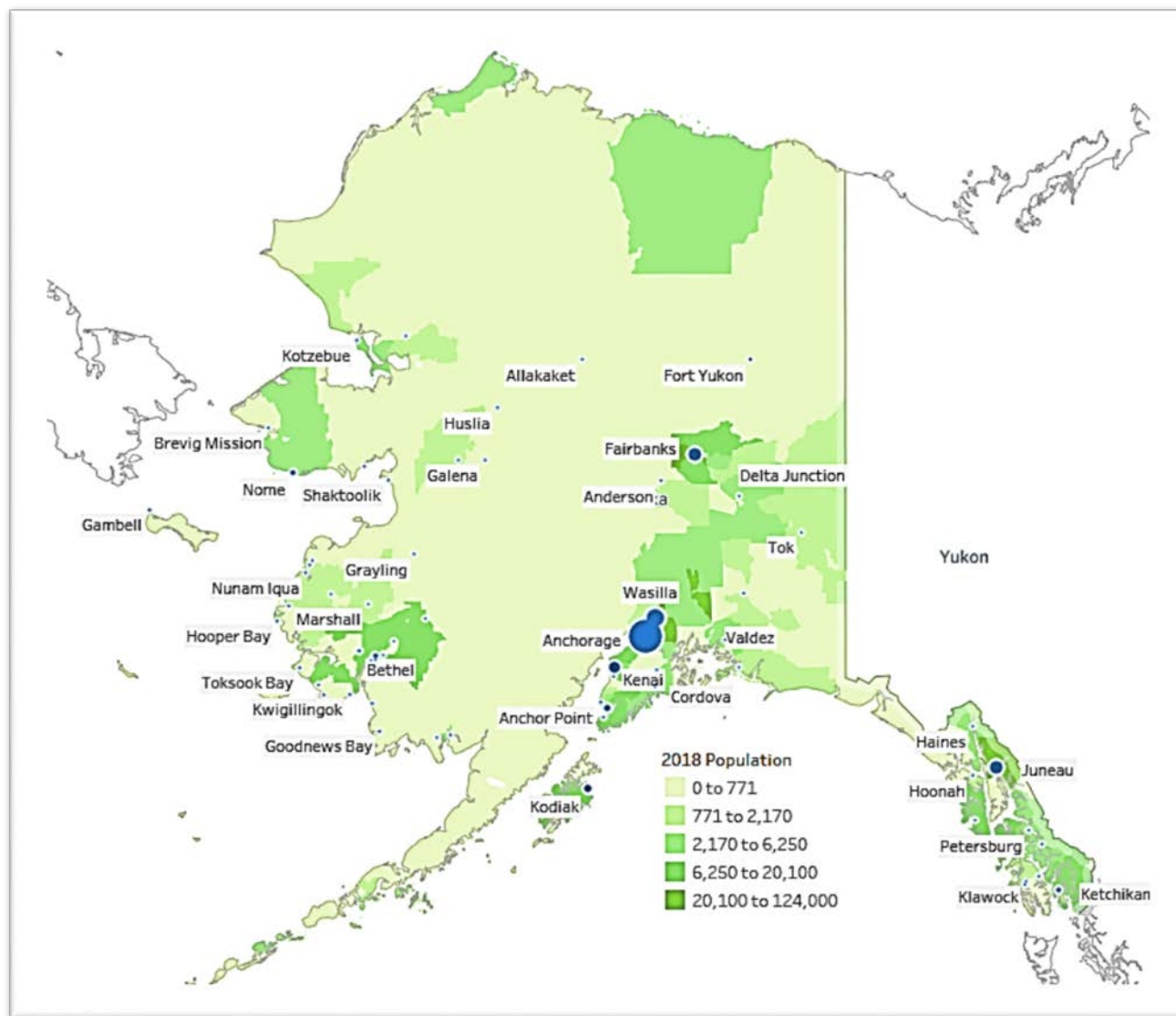


Figure 1: SFY 2018 IDD Medicaid waivers.

Data Source: State of Alaska Dept. of Health and Social Services, Division of Senior and Disabilities Services.

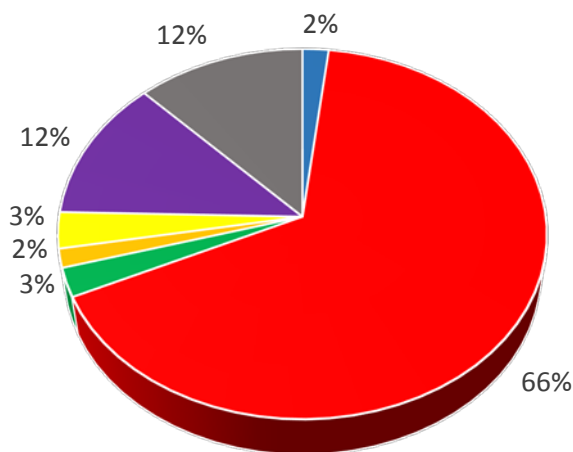
Anchorage Area = 395
 Fairbanks Area = 66
 Kenai Area = 44
 All Other Areas = 131

Mat-Su Area = 118
 Juneau Area = 61
 Kodiak Area = 21

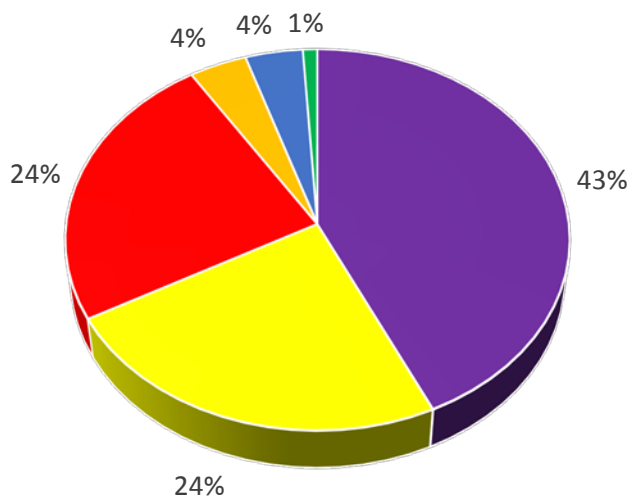
Most Significantly Disabled (cont'd)

- g. Currently, AKDVR is showing significantly different disabilities served between those individuals served in the Vocational Rehabilitation program versus students with disabilities (SWDs) who are potentially eligible and receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services.

SFY 2018 Disabilities Potentially Eligible Students



SFY 2018 Disabilities VR Participants



- Blind/Visual Impairments
- Cognitive
- Communicative Impairments
- Deafness/Hearing Loss
- Physical and Orthopedic
- Psychosocial
- Unknown

Figure 2: SFY 2018 PE and VR Disabilities. Data Source: AKDVR case management software.

Most Significantly Disabled (cont'd)

- h. As shown in Figure 2, in SFY 2017, 66% of SWD reported a cognitive impairment as a primary disabling condition versus 24% of the VR program population. Additionally, 12% of SWD reported experiencing a psychosocial disability, significantly lower than the 43% who experience psychosocial disabilities who are served by the VR program. Only 3% of SWD reported experiencing a physical or orthopedic impairment compared to 24% of the VR population.
- i. The difference in disability types between the student with a disability population versus the VR program population is somewhat expected given AKDVRs heightened focus on students who are receiving services under an Individualized Education Plan.

Underserved

2. What are the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing in Alaska, particularly the vocational rehabilitation services needs of individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program?

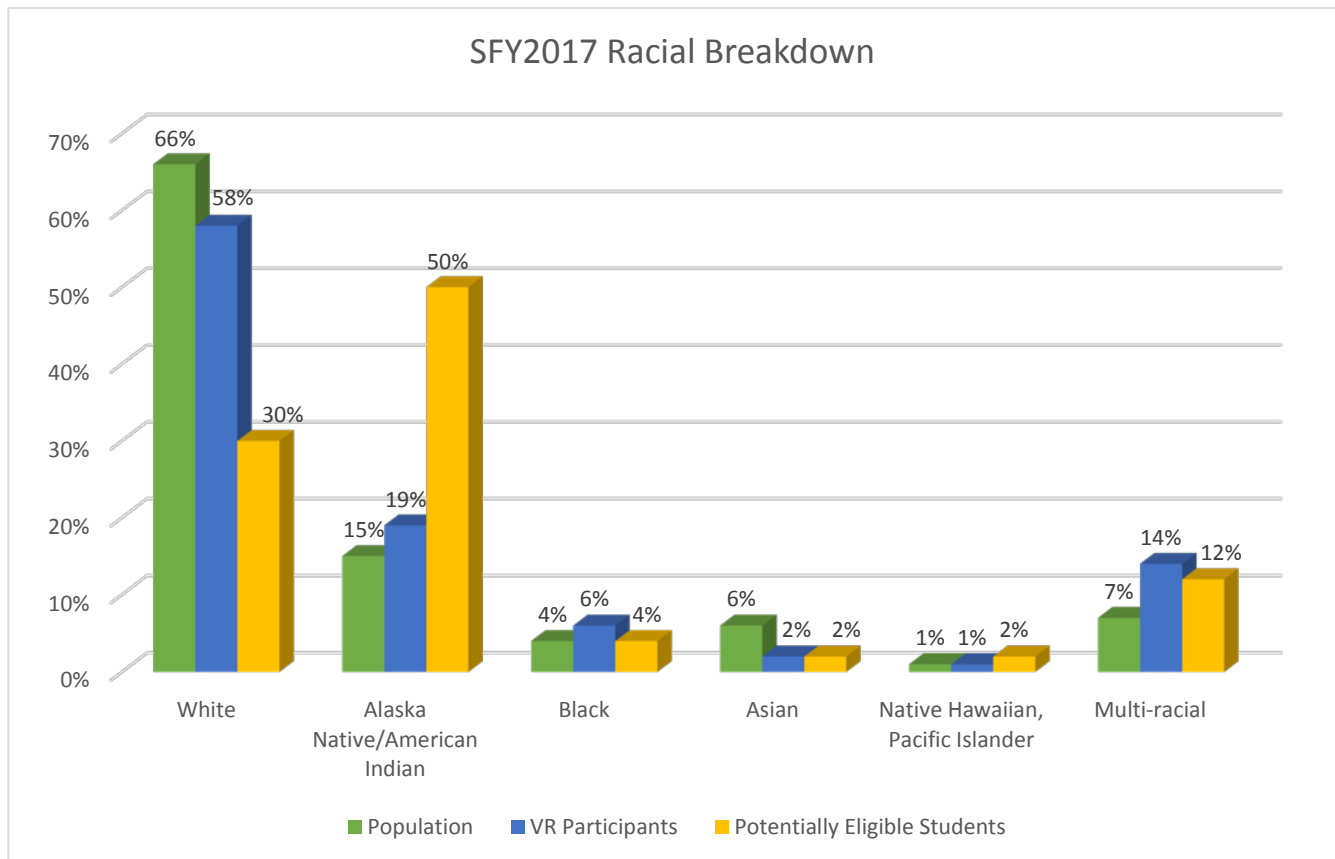


Figure 3: SFY 2017 Racial demographics. Data Source: American Communities Projections and AKDVR Case Management Software

Underserved (cont'd)

- a. AKDVR collects demographic information of participants to ensure that there are no minority groups that may be underserved. The racial distribution of potentially eligible students with a disability served by AKDVR is also reviewed. Figure 3 shows the racial breakdown by population for the state, along with actual race for participants, and potentially eligible students.
- b. The State of Alaska is experiencing a population decline as out-migration is currently exceeding in-migration. The changes are relatively small, less than 1% and this trend is fairly recent; however, this can have an impact on services due to reduced availability of resources
- c. Economic conditions and lack of employment opportunities affect rural communities. Often participants must travel to urban areas for training or employment, removing them from their support groups and family. In addition, this increases the cost of training as there are costs for transportation and housing.
- d. AKDVR recognizes that the most underserved population are those individuals living in rural and remote areas of the state. Counselors are assigned to regional "hub" areas, which are more highly populated rural areas, such as Bethel, Dillingham, Barrow, Nome, and Kotzebue, where AKDVR does not have offices. The assigned counselors travel to rural hubs to meet with participants several times a year. Though technology, such as GoToMeeting and SARA (communication software) does assist with communication efforts, internet is often limited in rural areas. Combined with the lack of other supportive services as well as limited employment opportunities in these communities, serving rural participants can be challenging. Figure 4 shows the distribution of the population across Alaska along with the distribution of individuals served by the VR program. Areas in which AKDVR has field offices, which are also in the most highly populated areas of the state, are adequately served, whereas, rural and remote areas in which AKDVR can only serve itinerantly show significantly smaller numbers.

Map has the 2018 population figures by zip code in green shading. This highlights the large geographical areas that are sparsely populated in the state.

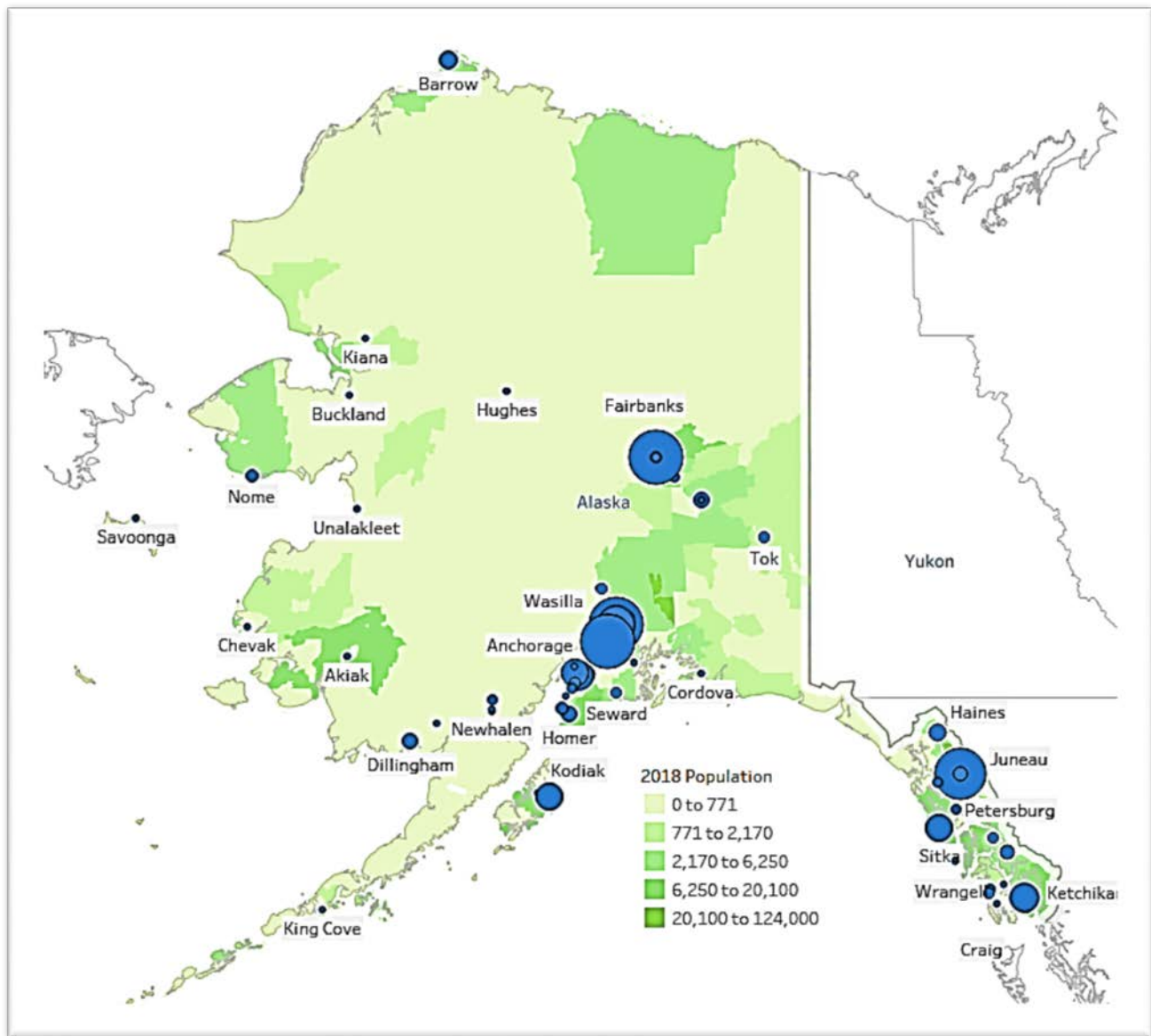


Figure 4: SFY 2018, Individuals Served. Data Source: AKDVR Case Management Software.

Anchorage Area: 556
 Mat-Su Area = 358
 Kenai Area = 106
 Kodiak Area = 46

Fairbanks Area = 395
 Juneau Area = 229
 Ketchikan, Sitka Area = 100

Working with the Statewide Workforce Development System

3. What are the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing in Alaska, particularly the vocational rehabilitation services needs of individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce development system as identified by those individuals and personnel assisting those individuals through the components of the system?
 - a. AKDVR works closely with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners and routinely refers participants to other WIOA programs. For PY18, the Wagner-Peyser program served 1,973 individuals with disabilities, 213 of whom were youth ages 16-24. The individuals identified by the WIOA partners are individuals who have self-disclosed a disability and do not necessarily meet the eligibility criteria for AKDVR services. The Infrastructure Cost Agreement with the Division of Employment and Training Services (DETS), identified 196 individuals shared with AKDVR in PY17.
 - b. The Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) program has been active in Alaska since 2010 building a cohesive system in which to support individuals with disabilities. Alaska was, in PY17, administering a DEI Round VI grant focusing on building partnerships to meet the needs of youth with disabilities, aged 14 to 24, by expanding access to employment and career pathways to prepare for in-demand careers. Unfortunately, the DEI grant cycle ended in PY18.
 - c. The Governor and Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) have determined that the expansion of Registered Apprenticeship by employers will lead youth and adults, including those with disabilities and those who have multiple barriers to employment, into good paying jobs with career opportunities, while providing employers with new workers to fill in-demand occupations.
 - d. The Division of Labor and Workforce Development is working with the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development and local school districts to expand work-based learning opportunities for students and out-of-school youth, including youth with disabilities. This includes school-to-apprenticeship programs, internships, and co-operative learning to strengthen career paths and better prepare young Alaskans for employment in their career field.

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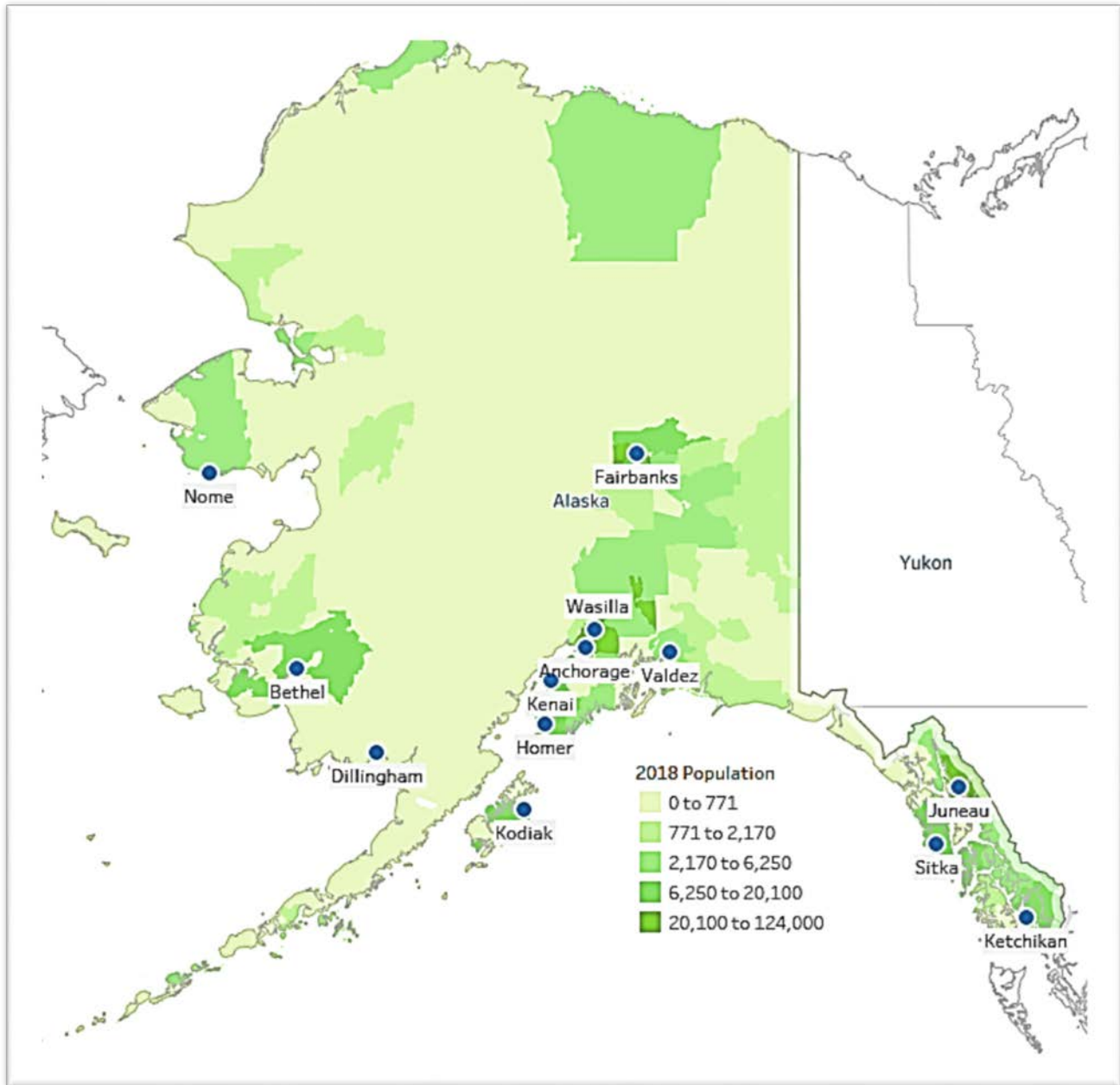


Figure 5: Current Job Center Locations. Data Source: State of Alaska Employment and Training Services Division.

- e. AKDVR is co-located in five of the 13 American Job Centers (shown in Figure 5) throughout the state. Those co-located offices are located in Wasilla, Kodiak, Juneau, Sitka, and Ketchikan. In addition, AKDVR counselors work with Job centers in Nome, Dillingham, Bethel, and Homer when traveling to those locations.

Working with the Statewide Workforce Development System (cont'd)

- f. The referral process among the core programs is implemented on an individualized basis depending on the specific needs of the individual. All DOLWD staff are trained and expected to be knowledgeable in the requirements and eligibility of other core programs to ensure an appropriate program referral. Appropriate referrals are necessary to leverage resources and maximize service delivery to individuals while ensuring non-duplication of services. For example, AJC staff that provide initial intake and career services have been trained through the Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) to appropriately identify and refer individuals to disability services such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation, and other supporting entities. This training has provided a high level of thoughtfulness to the reason for each referral, increasing the success for the participant when obtaining needed services. Coordinated data collection mechanisms will be implemented to capture cross-agency referral.
- g. AKDVR is currently pilot testing SARA (communication software), provided by The Career Index and paid for by the United States Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Through the use of this communication software, AKDVR and other WIOA partners within the state workforce system are able to share data and partner on services for mutual clients, as required under Section 116(d)(2) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities

Youth and Potentially Eligible Students with Disabilities

- 4. What are the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing in Alaska, particularly the vocational rehabilitation services needs of youth with disabilities, and students with disabilities, including their needs for pre-employment transition services or other transition services; and an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services provided are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in order to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities?
 - a. In AKDVR's 2016-2018 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, AKDVR developed a target goal of 585 students to be provided Pre-Employment Transition Services annually through 2021. For State Fiscal Years (SFY) 2017 and 2018, AKDVR exceeded this goal, serving 846 in SFY17 and 802 in SFY18. AKDVR was able to expend the required 15% of its federal award set aside for Pre-Employment Transition Services. To date, AKDVR is on track to, once again, meet that target number in SY2019.

Youth and Potentially Eligible Students with Disabilities (cont'd)

- b. AKDVR's Transition Coordinator works closely with the State of Alaska's Department of Education and Early Development (DEED). The April 1, 2019 report outlining Alaska's State Systemic Improvement Plan, Phase III, is designed to increase the graduation rates of students with disabilities. The report includes the participation and collaboration with AKDVR and the Pre-Employment Transition Services that have been offered to potentially eligible students ages 14-21.
- c. AKDVR's Transition Coordinator developed and distributed technical assistance to teachers via a secondary transition newsletter and promoting transition initiatives that are successful.
- d. AKDVR's Transition Coordinator created a coaching model that focuses on teacher and student knowledge of post-secondary transition requirements, best practices, and Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) transition services. This coaching is offered through distance learning and is in coordination with the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT).
- e. AKDVR's Transition Coordinator worked with the NTACT to host a two-day transition academy in Bethel for special education teachers from the Lower Kuskokwim School District. Thirty teachers were provided the opportunity to meet with local and state partners for services to support high school students in achieving graduation and moving into their post-school realities. Teachers were also given tips about transition assessments and writing transition plans. Attendees learned about JOBZ Club and S'Cool Store (transition curriculums provided by AKDVR), programs for developing entrepreneurship, and ways of incorporating subsistence activities into transition plans. An additional six virtual sessions with NTACT and AKDVR are incorporated into this training.
- f. AKDVR's Transition Coordinator presented at the 2019 Alaska State Special Education Conference. This session provided information on how AKDVR can enhance transition services to prepare students to transition from school to work.
- g. Alaska DEED and school district staff are working with AKDVR to evaluate the effectiveness of JOBZ Club and S'Cool Store in increasing graduation rates and post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. As SFY2019 is the first year of collecting data at the student level, this will be an on-going evaluation.
- h. AKDVR will also be providing data to Alaska DEED on employers who provide opportunities for high school students with disabilities.

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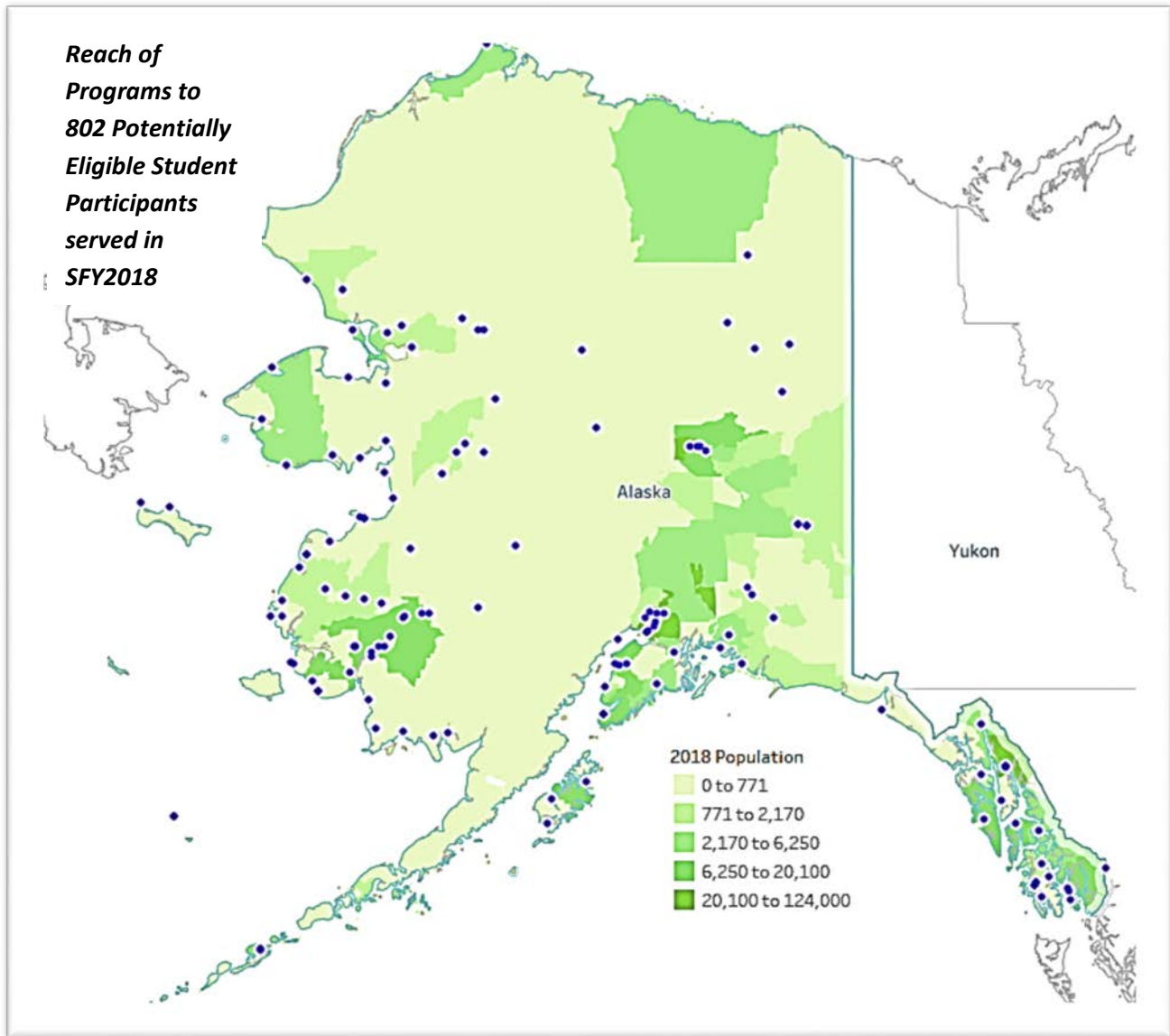


Figure 6: SFY 2018 Pre-ETS Participant locations. Data Source: AKDVR Case Management Software.

- i. As shown in Figure 6, AKDVR has been extremely successful in providing statewide services to transition age students in urban, rural, and remote locations. This has been accomplished through partnerships with school districts, specialized Pre-Employment Transition Services Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), and other organizations that assist with coordinating transportation and enrollment.

Need for CRPs

5. An assessment of the need to establish, develop, or improve Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) within the state.
 - a. Having an adequate number of CRPs who are able to deliver a wide variety of services has been a consistent challenge for AKDVR, even in urban areas. As seen in Figure 7, there are a limited number of CRPs in urban areas and remote locations may not have any. Monitoring CRP performance and accountability can also be a challenge and requires a full time CRP Coordinator to manage the quality assurance process.
 - b. The availability of adequate training for CRPs is an obstacle, and finding those with specialized transition training to work with students with disabilities has been difficult.
 - c. AKDVR has at least one counselor in each regional office to perform in-house job development services to meet the dual customer model that addresses the needs of both employers and participants and to offset CRPs who lack job development experience.
 - d. In rural areas, AKDVR's Transition Coordinator has developed an abbreviated process to allow for Special Education teachers to become Teacher CRPs more quickly in order to deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities.

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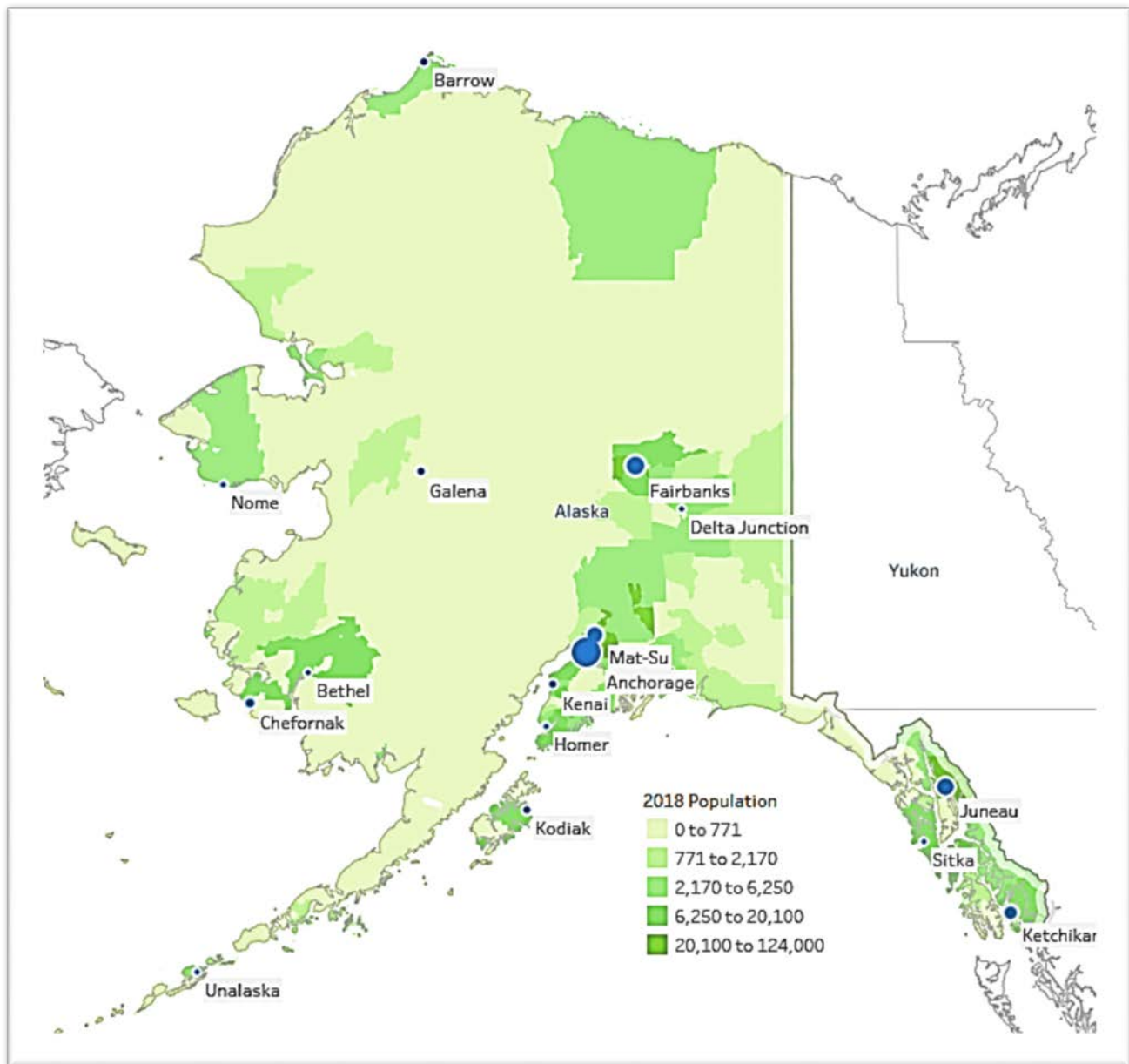


Figure 7: Current number of CRPs and their locations. Data Source: AKDVR Case Management Software.

Anchorage Area = 30
 Juneau Area = 10
 Ketchikan, Sitka Area = 7

Fairbanks Area = 12
 Mat-Su Area = 9
 Kenai Area = 2

Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's Internal Evaluation

In addition to gathering information to address the regulatory requirements of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), AKDVR conducted further research to identify where gaps in services or service delivery could be occurring. This information, combined with that gathered for the federally required queries will be the foundation for AKDVR's three year Strategic Plan for Improvement as well as the State of Alaska Combined State Plan, both of which are due in 2020.

One of the gaps AKDVR has identified is the disconnect between the placement of participants in employment fields and Alaska's high demand occupations. AKDVR identified several factors that impact employment in the State of Alaska in addition to limited employment opportunities in many rural and remote communities.

Identification of industry growth opportunities does provide valuable information for both participants and counselors. Labor market research is required for participants to determine employment potential and to guide career and training requirements. However, maintaining consistency within AKDVR is difficult given the geographical and economic differences between regions. These differences often impact employment and the availability of opportunities for career pathways and training services. By identifying the overarching issues within Alaska's economy and the availability of high demand occupations, AKDVR can better align clients with careers and provide the services, training, and education required for high demand occupations to participants.

Impacts on Employment

Alaska's economy

1. According to the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development Division of Research and Analysis³, Alaska has lost a cumulative 12,700 jobs since 2011. A steep drop in oil prices, from \$100/barrel to below \$30/barrel, caused job losses in areas of the state with relatively high concentrations of oil and gas productivity. This drop in oil prices also negatively impacted professional and business services firms, state government, and construction. The North Slope Borough was impacted the most, but the large urban cities of Anchorage, Juneau, and Fairbanks also recorded substantial job losses.
2. The economic downturn from the decrease in oil revenue has affected the entire state, including areas that did not experience direct job losses. Employees in the oil and gas industry often work on the North Slope but live in hundreds of communities throughout the state. This meant the loss of local economic income because those high-wage employees were no longer contributing

³ Alaska Economic Trends magazine, published in February 2019 by the State of Alaska, Division of Research and Analysis, article by Dan Robinson.

Alaska's economy (cont'd)

to their communities. Additionally, all Alaskans are affected, to some degree, by the State's budgetary shortfalls. State-funded services and operations face an uncertain future, and changes are being considered in the size of state government, the types and amounts of revenues collected, or both.

- a. Alaska's economy ranked last in U.S. from 2015 to 2018. Alaska, along with North Dakota and Wyoming, suffered noticeable job losses, suggesting that sparsely populated states heavily dependent on oil, were adversely affected by the drop in oil prices.
- b. Government employment has continued to decrease at both the state and local levels. State government has lost 3,000 jobs since its employment peak in 2014 and will decline further as the state continues to adjust to budgetary constraints. AKDVR estimates a loss of 200 state government jobs in 2019 and major changes such as hiring freezes, significant budget cuts, and department restructuring could mean additional losses.⁴

Declining jobs vs. high growth jobs

1. Civilian federal government tops the list of declining jobs, losing 16% of its jobs over the past 27 years (-2,500 jobs). Alaska's federal employment peaked at 20,000 jobs in 1993 and has declined steadily since. Because federal government is one of the highest-paying industries in Alaska, these declines represent a disproportionate impact to the State's economy. Other industries that have seen steady decline are oil and gas, logging, legal services, traditional media, and laundry services.
2. The highest growth industry in Alaska is the health care industry, with ambulatory health care and hospital categories taking the top two high growth spots, which added nearly 15,000 new jobs over 27 years (from 1990 to present), more than tripling in size. Ambulatory health care services includes all types of outpatient health care providers, such as doctors' and dentists' offices, dialysis centers, medical laboratories, and home health services. Increasing hospitals and nursing care facilities shows health care represented more than 30 percent of all the state's job gains since the 90's. Other high growth/demand industries including restaurants, local government, and industries linked to tourism, mining, and international cargo.

Aligning AKDVR outcomes to high demand occupations:

In SFY 2018, actual employment for rehabilitated participants did not significantly reflect trends in high demand jobs. As shown in Figures 8 and 9, the major growth area in the foreseeable future is the in the health care industry. AKDVR does not appear to be placing participants into the health care field at the level that reflects the growth in this field. AKDVR shows placements in food preparation, building and grounds (janitorial), personal care and community and social services, however, it not equal to the growth forecast for Alaska. Improving this alignment will be a concentrated effort by AKDVR moving forward.

⁴ Alaska Economic Trends magazine, published in January 2019 by the State of Alaska, Division of Research and Analysis, article by Karinne Wiebold.

Matching colors denotes overlapping occupational fields.

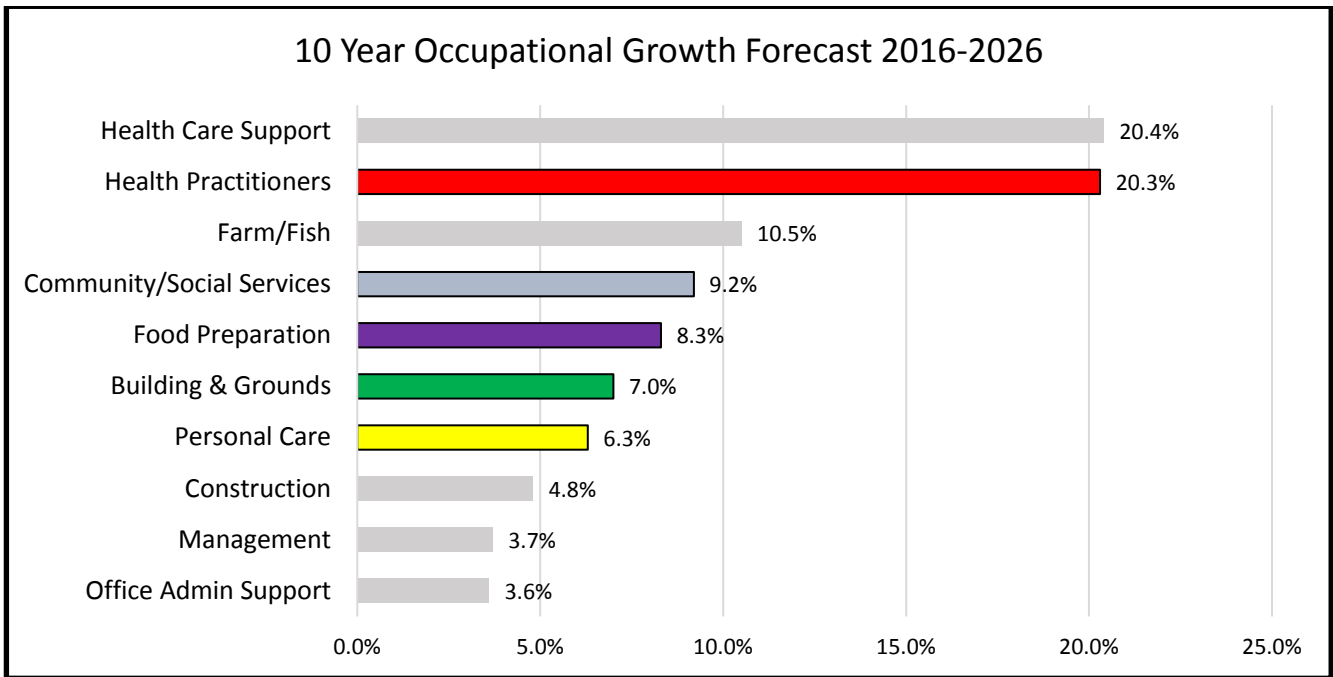


Figure 8: 10 Year Occupational Growth. Data Source: Alaska Economic Trends magazine, January 2019.

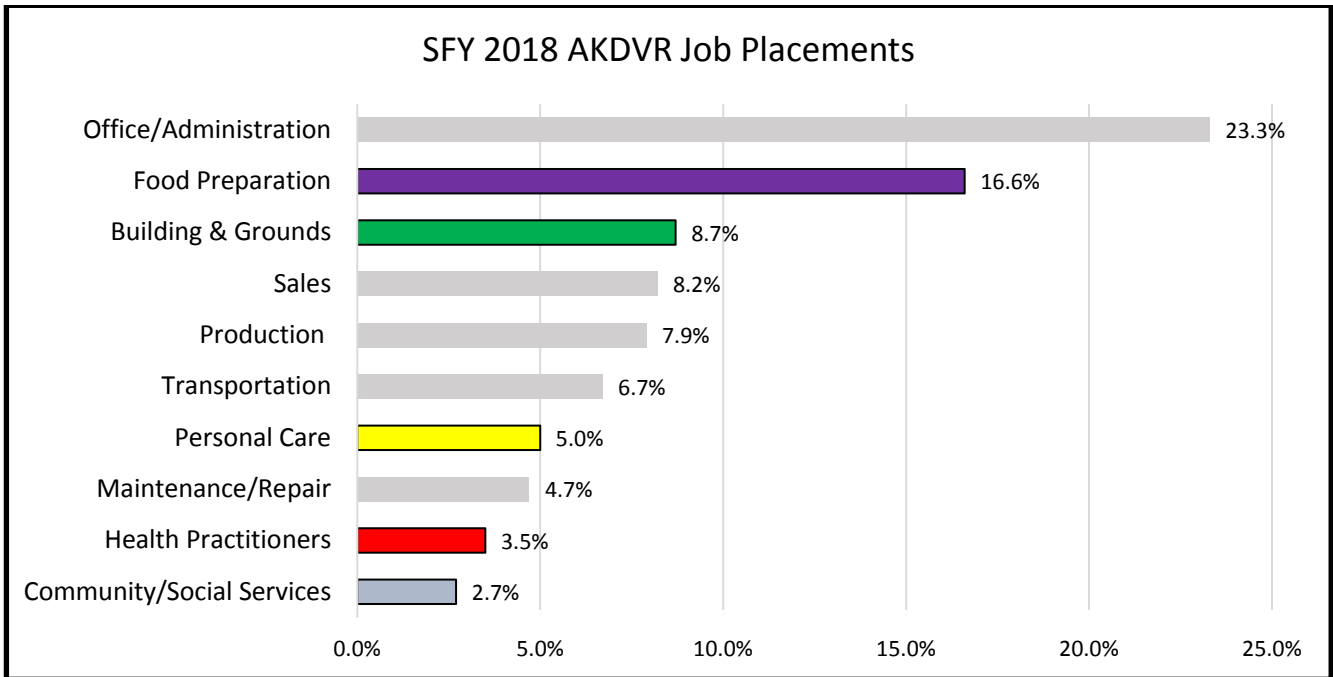


Figure 9: SFY 2018 AKDVR Job Placements. Data Source: AKDVR Case Management Software.

Job Development and Employer Engagement

1. Adequate numbers of CRPs with job development knowledge and adequate skills and training are particularly hard to find outside major population hubs. AKDVR has full-time Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors who perform job development in all regional offices to help fill this gap. However, they too require training and skills to be able to successfully place participants in appropriate employment.
2. With in-house job developers and the emphasis on employer engagement and training as required by the Workforce and Innovation Opportunities Act of 2014, services to businesses has become a heavy focus area for AKDVR. The agency has developed a Business Engagement Services Team to enhance employer relationships with stand-alone employer training modules. The greatest challenge appears to be that employers do not yet understand how hiring individuals with disabilities can be a positive hiring strategy. In order to gather information on employer attitudes and beliefs about hiring individuals with disabilities, the Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education conducted a survey in both 2016 and 2018 during the Statewide Human Resource Manager (SHRM) conference. This survey was developed to measure employer perceptions about hiring individuals with disabilities. The comparison results are shown below in Figure 10. From 2016 to 2018, there has been some improvement in perception that most or some individuals with disabilities could be employed successfully. This data will help AKDVR formulate the best training approach to address employer concerns and misconceptions.

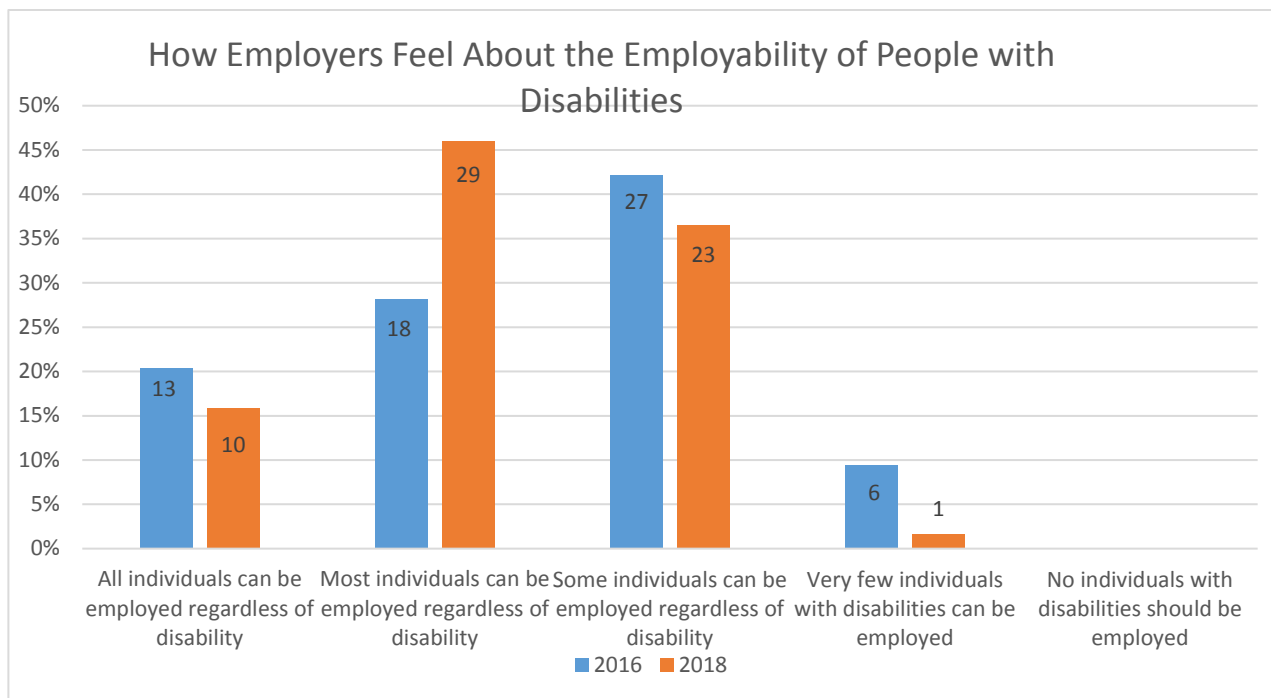


Figure 10: 2016 and 2018 Survey Results. Data Source: State of Alaska Dept. of Health and Social Services, Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education.

Summary

The Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's (AKDVR) Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment was designed to capture the needs of individuals with disabilities and to identify gaps and barriers. The data collected will be used to improve AKDVR services through strategic planning efforts which will include representation from AKDVR personnel, the State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee, American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Projects, and other important stakeholders.

- Providing services to the most severely disabled and supported employment population continues to be a challenge. Long term supports have limited availability.
- Underserved population continues to be rural and remote populations. Finding service providers is especially difficult in rural and remote areas, contributing to those populations being underserved.
- Engaging with WIOA partners to share resources, data and participants to provide services to the population we serve will be an on-going project. AKDVR will need to continue to work closely with Job Centers.
- To provide Pre-Employment Transition Services will require working closely with Alaska Department of Education and Early Development to provide transition services to as many potentially eligible students as possible, both in urban and rural/remote areas.
- Using the existing data on labor and population trends, high demand job projections, and specific information on the economic health of Alaska, AKDVR can better target its efforts towards those employers and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This same data can also be used to identify those employment opportunities that may present the greatest challenges for both participants and employers. AKDVR's focus should be on those outcomes that present the best opportunities for success for everyone involved.
- AKDVR should continue to strengthen and expand pre-employment transition services that more closely align with high demand employment opportunities and continue to work closely with the Alaska Department of Early Education to ensure that AKDVR services are a part of transition services. In addition, the agency should expand outreach to students with a disability to inform them of the training and career services that AKDVR offers.
- AKDVR should expand training and outreach to employers, particularly those in high demand industries. With the additional job developers on staff with AKDVR, developing better relations with employers will be an opportunity to provide training and education to employers across Alaska.

AKDVR will begin drafting its three-year Strategic Plan in September of 2019. The plan will identify goals to improve service delivery to Alaskans with disabilities. The goals will include measurable objectives, strategies, and identify staff responsible for activities. Additionally, this plan will flow into the AKDVR portion of the Alaska Combined State Plan, which will be due in March of 2020.

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