

# Executive Summary

Kessler Foundation, East Hanover, New Jersey

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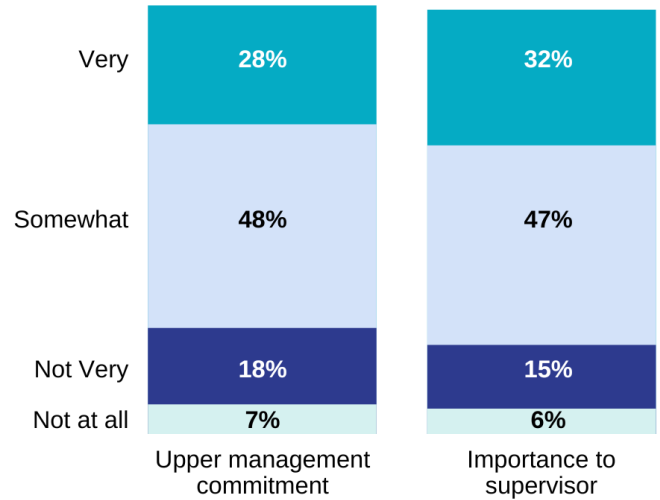
Conducted by the University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability, Durham, NH

## Synopsis

Kessler Foundation, in partnership with the University of New Hampshire (UNH), conducted the 2022 Kessler Foundation National Employment and Disability Survey: Supervisor Perspectives (2022 KFNEDS:SP2) to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment practices as they relate to people with disabilities, to identify the practices used by employers to increase the employment of people with disabilities, and to understand supervisors' views about the effectiveness of these practices. Building off the 2017 Kessler Foundation National Employment and Disability Survey: Supervisor Perspectives (2017 KFNEDS:SP) (Kessler Foundation and UNH, 2017), the 2022 KFNEDS:SP2 enables comparisons with supervisor perspectives today and pre-pandemic, capturing the impact of the national lockdown on employer practices and procedures to identify negative and/or positive changes since the original 2017 supervisor survey.

The 2017 KFNEDS-SP was the first national survey to look at the effectiveness of the practices that employers used to recruit, hire, train, and retain people with disabilities in their organizations, from the unique perspective of supervisors of employees with and without disabilities. It was intended to provide direction for expanding inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace.

The 2022 KFNEDS:SP2 builds upon the 2017 KFNEDS:SP survey, which used an innovative design to identify effective practices. Both surveys



Commitment and importance of hiring people with disabilities

*\*(Columns may not equal 100% due to rounding)*

asked supervisors whether their organization used a particular employment practice, and if so, whether it was effective. When a practice applied to both people with and without disabilities, both surveys asked whether the practice was as effective with regard to people with disabilities. The 2022 KFNEDS:SP2 shows that employers have made some gains in recruiting, hiring, training, accommodating, and retaining people with disabilities in their organizations since the 2017 KFNEDS:SP. Moreover, it demonstrates some challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic presented as well as adaptive responses that many workplaces enlisted to combat those challenges.

## Objective

The 2022 KFNEDS:SP2 was fielded in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including questions designed to assess the impact of the pandemic on the employment of persons with disabilities, while also including questions similar to those included in the 2017 KFNEDS:SP survey to capture any changes that have occurred over the past five years in the processes and practices employers use to employ people with disabilities. Like the 2017 survey, the

2022 KFNEDS:SP2 addressed challenges common to employer-focused research by surveying supervisors on their own time, rather than while they were at work, allowing them to maintain their organizations' anonymity, their personal anonymity, and avoid pressure to respond in "socially desirable" ways.

The 2022 survey followed the design of the 2017 survey in measuring the effectiveness of

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## Objective - continued

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employer practices for recruiting, hiring, training, accommodating, and retaining persons with disabilities. If a supervisor reported that their organization used a practice, they were then asked whether it was effective, and then, whether the practice was more effective, as effective, or less

effective for people with disabilities. The design also delved inside organizational perspectives about employing people with disabilities—asking supervisors about the commitment of upper management relative to their own perspectives.

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## Methods

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The 2022 KFNEDS:SP2 was conducted using standard, replicable survey practices. From May 11, 2022, to June 25, 2022, a sample of supervisors from U.S. employers was invited to take the survey as part of Qualtrics and partners business-to-business (B2B) panel. More than 14,000 respondents (n=14,399) ages 18 and older consented to participate in accordance with UNH Institutional Review Board procedures. Of those, 1,587 were dropped because their organizations employed fewer than 25 people. Another 268 were removed for not supervising any direct reports in their current position, and 195 were dropped for indicating that they either did not understand the definition of disability as

presented or did not wish to continue the survey. An additional 1,581 were dropped for inattentive or rushed responding. More than 6,000 (n=6,553) were excluded because the disability supervision quota was reached and 375 were excluded because the no disability supervision quota was reached.

Completed surveys were available from 3,840 respondents. Of those, 43 were removed by the researchers as they either did not report a state for their location of work or stated that they worked outside the U.S. The final analytic sample was 3,797 supervisors ages 18 and older working in the U.S. for organizations that employed 25 people or more.

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## COVID-19

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An important set of findings from the 2022 KFNEDS-SP2 describes the impact of the pandemic on employment practices. Nearly half (47 percent) of supervisors shared that the COVID-19 pandemic had a moderate-to-large negative effect on their organizations.

While 40 percent reported little or no change in the number of employees at their organizations, 38 percent reported moderate-to-large decreases in the number of employees. Forty-seven percent reported a moderate-to-large increase in the percentage of paid employees working from home. Of those who reported a moderate-to-large increase in working from home, 69 percent expected this percentage to increase in the coming years.

More than three-quarters (76 percent) of supervisors who worked in organizations with established accommodation processes stated that their organization used their established processes for employees who wanted to request accommodations

because they were more susceptible to COVID-19. Seventy-eight percent of supervisors stated that their organization established or changed their accommodation processes due to issues created by COVID-19.

Forty percent of supervisors managed employees who experienced any lasting physical and/or mental effects of a COVID-19 infection. Of supervisors who managed these employees, 58 percent stated that the employees received accommodations. Eleven percent reported not providing accommodations because the effects of COVID-19 were not severe enough to decrease productivity, 19 percent reported not providing accommodations because the employee did not request them, and 11 percent stated that accommodations could not be provided because of the nature of the work. As the survey did not capture further details about the nature of work that precluded the provision of accommodations, further research in this area is needed.

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## Commitment of Upper Management

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Another key finding of the 2022 KFNEDS:SP2 is that the importance supervisors give to recruiting, hiring, training, accommodating, and retaining employees with disabilities at times mirrors that of upper management (in the case of hiring people with disabilities) and at other times is stronger than that of upper management (in the case of recruiting, training, accommodating, and retaining people with disabilities).

Certain gains have been made since 2017 as well. In terms of hiring, for example, 32 percent of supervisors surveyed in 2022 felt it was very important to hire people with disabilities and 28 percent of upper management were viewed as very committed to this goal. These percentages have increased since 2017, yet commitment levels between supervisors and upper management were closely aligned in both years. In 2017, only 22 percent of supervisors felt it was very important to hire people with disabilities and 20 percent of upper management was viewed as very committed to hiring

people with disabilities.

Supervisors' commitments diverged from upper management's perceived commitment in other areas. As one example, when asked about providing employees with requested accommodations, 57 percent of supervisors in the 2022 survey felt it was very important, while 40 percent of upper managers were seen as very committed. Slightly higher percentages were reported in the 2017 survey as 66 percent of supervisors felt it was very important to provide employees with requested accommodations and 47 percent of upper management was seen as very committed in this area.

Taken together, these results about the commitment of upper management suggest that while many supervisors in an organization may support the goal of employing people with disabilities, when it comes to the details of realizing that goal, supervisors are perceiving less commitment and support than needed from upper management.

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## Organizational Processes

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Another important set of findings from the 2022 survey relate to organizational processes. Although some gains have been made, many organizational processes were still not viewed as effective for people with disabilities as they were for the general population. Supervisors in the 2022 survey reported that higher proportions of organizations had disability hiring goals (49 percent, compared to 28 percent in 2017). Seventy-five percent of supervisors in 2022 reported that their organizations had hiring goals for other types of diversity, an increase of 18 percentage points since 2017. However, in 2022, although most supervisors (90 percent) worked for organizations that had established processes for recruiting employees (an increase of six percentage points from the 2017 survey), of the organizations that had a standard recruiting process, most supervisors in 2022 (92 percent) and 2017 (90 percent) believed the process to be effective in general, but fewer (73 percent in 2022 and 61 percent in 2017) felt that this recruiting process was as effective or more effective for recruiting employees with disabilities.

Similarly, in the 2022 KFNEDS:SP2, of the organizations that had a process to help new employees learn their jobs (91 percent), most supervisors (95 percent) believed the process

was effective for employees in general, but fewer (68 percent) felt that process was as effective or more effective for employees with disabilities. In 2017, of the organizations that had a process to help new employees learn their jobs (86 percent), most supervisors (93 percent) believed the process was effective for employees in general, but fewer (73 percent) felt that process was as effective for employees with disabilities.

On a positive note, more supervisors in 2022 stated that their organizations (71 percent, compared to 66 percent in 2017) had a process to provide requested accommodations to employees with disabilities. Nearly all supervisors (95 percent) believed the process was effective, suggesting an opportunity to provide support for the 29 percent of organizations that would benefit by having a formal accommodation process in place. A higher percentage of supervisors reported that their organizations (39 percent) had a centralized accommodation fund compared to 2017 (16 percent). When organizations did have an accommodation fund, most supervisors (92 percent in 2022 and 94 percent in 2017) felt it was effective at improving their ability to provide requested accommodations to employees.

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## Specific Employer Practices

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Findings from the 2022 KFNEDS:SP2 are similar in some ways to the 2017 survey in suggesting opportunities to engage employers about specific practices that supervisors find effective for improving their ability to employ or accommodate people with disabilities. Some practices are both widespread and effective. For example, in 2022, most organizations automatically used job shadowing (64 percent) and onsite training by supervisors and co-workers (71 percent) as ways to help new employees learn their jobs. In 2017, 66 percent of supervisors reported that they automatically used job shadowing and 73 used onsite training by supervisors and co-workers as ways to help new employees learn their jobs. Across both surveys, almost all supervisors (96 percent in 2022 and 97 percent in 2017) reported that job shadowing was effective for training employees, in general, although a lower percentage of supervisors in 2022 (86 percent) felt it was as or more effective for training employees with disabilities than in 2017 (81 percent).

More supervisors reported the use of flexible working arrangements in 2022 compared to 2017. For example, 26 percent of supervisors reported that their organizations offered job sharing as a flexible working arrangement for all employees in 2022, an increase of 13 percentage points since 2017. In 2022, most (84 percent) supervisors reported that their organizations offered employees the option of working from home some or most of the time. In 2022, a flexible work schedule was reported by 40 percent of supervisors as an accommodation practice that was automatically available to all employees. This was a large increase from 2017, when only 25 percent of supervisors reported similarly. Forty-four percent of supervisors in 2022 and 52 percent of supervisors in 2017 indicated that flexible work schedules could be offered at supervisor discretion or upon employee request.

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## Closing Comments

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This Executive Summary highlights the major findings of the 2022 KFNEDS:SP2. Many more analyses are planned for these data, which will add to our understanding of the factors contributing to the employment of people with disabilities.