

damaged. The age of onset peaks between 20 and 30 years. Almost 70 percent of persons exhibit symptoms between the ages of 21 and 40. The life expectancy of persons with MS is essentially normal; however, there may be progressive or recurring and relapsing incidences of symptoms and disability over the life course. Recent pharmacological treatments reduce the progression or frequency of attacks of the symptoms for some people with MS, and other treatments are effective for some manifestations of the disease.

Letters of Intent

Due to the open nature of this competition, NIDRR is requiring all potential applicants to submit a Letter of Intent (LOI). Each LOI must be limited to a maximum of four pages and must include the following information: (1) The title of the proposed RRTC, the name of the host institution, the name of the Principal Investigator (PI), and the names of partner institutions and entities; (2) a brief statement of the vision, goals, and objectives of the proposed RRTC and a description of its research and development activities at a sufficient level of detail to allow NIDRR to select potential peer reviewers; (3) a list of proposed RRTC staff including the center Director and key personnel; and (4) a list of individuals whose selection as a peer reviewer might constitute a conflict of interest due to involvement in proposal development, selection as an advisory board member, co-PI relationships, etc.

Submission of a LOI is a prerequisite for eligibility to submit an application. The signed, original LOI, or with prior approval an email or facsimile copy, must be received by NIDRR no later than June 9, 2003. Applicants that submit email or facsimile copies must follow up by sending to NIDRR the signed original copy no later than one week after the date the e-mail or facsimile copy was sent. All communications pertaining to the LOI must be sent to: Ruth Brannon, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW., room 3425, Switzer Building, Washington, DC 20202-2645. For further information regarding the LOI requirement, contact Ruth Brannon at (202) 358-2971 or by e-mail at: ruth.brannon@ed.gov.

Proposed Priorities

The Assistant Secretary proposes to fund up to seven RRTCs that will focus on rehabilitation to improve the health and function of persons with disabilities and thus to improve their ability to live in the community. Each RRTC must:

(1) Identify, develop, and evaluate rehabilitation techniques to address its respective area of research and improve outcomes for its designated population group;

(2) Develop, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive plan for training critical stakeholders, e.g., consumers/family members, practitioners, service providers, researchers, and policymakers;

(3) Provide technical assistance, as appropriate, to critical stakeholders, (e.g., consumers/family members, practitioners, and service providers) to facilitate utilization of research findings in its respective area of research; and

(4) Develop a systematic plan for widespread dissemination of informational materials based on knowledge gained from the Center's research activities, and disseminate the materials to persons with disabilities, their representatives, service providers, and other interested parties.

In addition to the activities proposed by the applicant to carry out these purposes, each RRTC must:

- Conduct a state-of-the-science conference on its respective area of research in the third year of the grant cycle and publish a comprehensive report on the final outcomes of the conference in the fourth year of the grant cycle. This conference must include materials from experts internal and external to the center;

- Coordinate on research projects of mutual interest with relevant NIDRR-funded projects as identified through consultation with the NIDRR project officer;

- Involve individuals with disabilities in planning and implementing its research, training, and dissemination activities, and in evaluating the Center;

- Demonstrate in its application how it will address, in whole or in part, the needs of individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds; and

- Demonstrate how the RRTC project will yield measurable results for people with disabilities;

- Identify specific performance targets and propose outcome indicators, along with time lines to reach these targets; and

- Demonstrate how the RRTC project can transfer research findings to practical applications in planning, policy-making, program administration, and delivery of services to individuals with disabilities.

Each RRTC must focus on one of the following priority topic areas:

(a) *Psycho-social Factors Affecting Individuals Aging with Disability:* This Center must conduct research and

training activities that generate new knowledge regarding the psycho-social issues that affect individuals aging with disabilities and the sources of resilience used by this population to cope with or respond to these issues. In an effort to improve long-term outcomes for these individuals, the Center is encouraged to identify or develop and test the effectiveness of interventions that will prevent or minimize the impact of psycho-social issues on the health, activity, and community participation of individuals with disabilities across the life span and promote positive adjustment and improved quality of life. The reference for this topic can be found in the Plan, Chapter 4, Health and Function: Research on Aging with a Disability.

(b) *Secondary Conditions in Rehabilitation of Individuals with Spinal Cord Injury (SCI):* In an effort to improve the general health, well-being, and community integration of individuals with SCI, this Center must conduct research and training activities to enhance knowledge regarding treatment or prevention strategies or both that address the wide array of secondary conditions associated with SCI, including, but not limited to, respiratory complications, urinary tract infections, pressure ulcers, pain, obesity, and depression. The reference for this topic can be found in the Plan, Chapter 4, Health and Function: Research on Secondary Conditions.

(c) *Community Integration of Individuals With Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI):* This Center must identify, assess, and evaluate current and emerging community integration needs of individuals with TBI, including but not limited to mild TBI. The Center should consider the impact of secondary conditions on community integration outcomes as well as the role of assistive devices and other technology. In addition, this Center must develop and evaluate a comprehensive plan to facilitate the translation of new knowledge into rehabilitation practice and the delivery of community-based services. The reference for this topic can be found in the Plan, Chapter 4, Health and Function: Research on Aging with a Disability.

(d) *Rehabilitation of Individuals with Neuromuscular Diseases:* This Center must conduct research that addresses rehabilitation needs, particularly related to exercise, nutrition, and pain, of individuals with neuromuscular diseases. In doing this, the Center must identify or develop and evaluate health promotion and wellness programs to enhance recreational opportunities for individuals with neuromuscular