

Older Blind Independent Living Services Program

Division of Visual Services, Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services

Purpose

The Older Blind Independent Living Program expands independent living services for people who are 55 years or older and legally blind. Rehabilitation teachers, located in the Division of Visual Services offices throughout the state, provide one-on-one assistance to older people in adjusting to blindness and regaining or maintaining maximum independence and self-sufficiency.

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<http://www.okrehab.org/drupal/independence/older-blind>

Financial Criteria

- See "Eligibility"

Eligibility

- Individuals must be 55 years of age or older;
- must be legally blind or have a progressive vision problem, which will lead to legal blindness in the foreseeable future and require services to enhance quality of life;
- legal blindness occurs when visual acuity with best correction is 20/200 or less or when side vision results in a field restriction of 20 degrees or less; and
- individuals that do not meet the vocational goal criteria for DRS may receive services through the Older Blind Independent Living Program.

AT Services Provided/Covered

- Advocacy Training
- Assessments & Evaluations
- Case Management
- Information & Referral
- Training for Consumer & Family
- Orientation and Mobility Training

AT Devices Provided/ Covered

- Aids for Daily Living
- Computers & Related
- Speech Communication
- Aids for Vision Impaired

Application Process

- Individuals are considered applicants when they:
 - have completed and signed an application form or have otherwise requested services (including, but not limited to requests made verbally, by telephone, in writing, by facsimile, etc.);
 - have provided information necessary to initiate an assessment to
 - determine eligibility and need for services; and
 - are available to complete the assessment process as soon as the rehabilitation teacher has a document signed by the individual requesting VS services. This may be a formal application or a letter signed by the applicant, applicant's parent, guardian, or other representative, which provides the minimum basic information and request VR services.
- In application status, the rehabilitation teacher will secure sufficient information to make a determination of eligibility or ineligibility for Older Blind services. The information needed may include a current visual examination and/or a low vision evaluation.
- The rehabilitation teacher will make the eligibility determination decision within 60 days of application.

Dispute Resolution Process

1. Individuals who disagree with a VS Program decision are encouraged to contact the local Program Manager to attempt an effective resolution of the issue. In the event of a reduction, suspension or cessation of VS services, individuals have a right to a case review by an impartial hearing officer, mediation, and/or assistance from the Client Assistance Program (CAP).
2. A request for a Fair Hearing should be made in writing to your VS rehabilitation teacher within 30 days of DRS informing you of the decision with which you disagree. The fair hearing will be conducted by a hearing officer within 45 days of the written "Request for a Fair Hearing" by the consumer.
3. Individuals filing a "Request for a Fair Hearing" may request a confidential mediation session to resolve grievances. Mediation is voluntary and subject to the agreement of both parties. In the event mediation sessions do not resolve the grievance, individuals retain their right to a fair hearing.

4. After filing a “Request for a Fair Hearing,” the administrative review must be conducted by the Program Manager and concluded within the same 45 days, with the results of the review provided in a written letter. If the review resolves the grievance, the Withdrawal of Request for Hearing Form must be completed; otherwise, the hearing will continue.
5. The written decision of the hearing officer including findings and grounds for the decision will be made to the consumer, hearings coordinator and the director of DRS within 30 days of the completion of the hearing.
6. Individuals may request a review of the hearing officer’s decision by the Cabinet Secretary of Human Services within 20 days of the decision.
7. In the event an individual brings civil action regarding the decision, the final decision either by the hearing officer or the Cabinet Secretary will be implemented pending court review.

Assistance Provided For Appeals

- The Client Assistance Program (CAP) assists persons with disabilities who are seeking or receiving services from any program funded by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. CAP can:
 - advise clients of their rights and responsibilities under the Rehabilitation Act;
 - assist clients in communicating their concerns to DRS; and
 - represent the individual in the fair hearing process when appropriate and/or needed.
- Additional information concerning vocational rehabilitation and the appeals process can be obtained from the CAP at (405) 521-3756 or (800) 522-8224 statewide.

Pieces of the Puzzle

- The Older Blind Program can provide an individual with a screen reader or screen enlargement software to assist them in using their existing computer, but the program does not purchase a computer.
- The Older Blind Program operates the Telephone Information Line, a free service that you can call 24/7, and hear daily recorded Tulsa World/The Oklahoman newspaper articles. In the Tulsa area, the number is (918) 743-3332. The statewide, toll free number is (800) 829-3255.