
Iowa Legislative Fiscal Bureau

Dennis Prouty
(515) 281-5279
FAX 281-8451



State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319
September 20, 2001

Iowa Department for the Blind

ISSUE

This *Issue Review* provides an overview of the operations, programs, services, and funding sources for the Iowa Department for the Blind.

AFFECTED AGENCIES

Department for the Blind

CODE AUTHORITY

Chapter 216B, [Code of Iowa](#)

Chapter 216C, [Code of Iowa](#)

Chapter 216D, [Code of Iowa](#)

Chapter 19A.2, [Code of Iowa](#)

Chapter 19B.3, [Code of Iowa](#)

Chapter 6A, Title 20, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, [U.S. Code](#)

BACKGROUND

The Department for the Blind, created in 1925, works with and assists Iowans who are blind so they may be productive and equal members of society. A Commission consisting of three members appointed by the Governor and confirmed in the Senate governs the Department. In turn, the Commission for the Blind appoints the Director for the Department. The Department's central office is in Des Moines, with district offices located in Cedar Rapids and Cedar Falls.

An estimated number of blind or visually impaired individuals in the State of Iowa is 57,000. An individual is considered blind if they have a central visual acuity of 20/200 in the better eye with corrective lenses, or a field vision of 20-degrees or less. Stated another way, an individual is blind if they see at 20 feet what a person with normal vision would see at 200 feet.

The Department serves both blind and physically handicapped individuals through an orientation and adjustment center, vocational and independent living rehabilitation, library services for the blind and physically handicapped, business enterprises, special tools, devices, and aids, registry of the blind, and public education and information.

CURRENT SITUATION

Programs and Services - The Department's programs focus on the primary needs of blind persons, in particular, their need to obtain competitive employment and economic parity with the rest of Iowa's workforce. As a result, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, which assists blind persons in achieving individual vocational goals, is the core of the Department's services, and the Department's other programs and initiatives further support the efforts of vocational rehabilitation.

The Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, serves individuals with a range of physical disabilities, but refers those with visual impairment to the Department for the Blind. Both agencies, however, receive federal funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration.

The Department's programs and services for Iowans who are blind include:

- **Orientation and Adjustment Center** - A residential training program for blind adults offered in the central office in Des Moines to provide training, tools, and information so blind individuals may be productive members of family and community.

Individuals who have recently lost their sight attend the Center to learn the techniques and skills of blindness, including travel with the long white cane, communications, such as Braille reading, writing and keyboarding skills, various homemaking skills, including cooking, sewing, uses of technology, and industrial arts.

- **Vocational Rehabilitation** - Instructors provide one-on-one teaching of the skills and techniques of blindness in an individual's home community. In addition, rehabilitation counselors work with blind persons to develop vocational goals so they receive appropriate training for employment.

Table I outlines the average hourly wage from 1996-2000 for blind individuals who participated in the Department's rehabilitation programs. In 2000, 171 blind individuals were successfully rehabilitated, with an average hourly wage of \$12.19.

TABLE I

Vocational Rehabilitation Program - Average Hourly Wage - Blind Individuals

2000	\$12.19
1999	\$11.41
1998	\$11.30
1997	\$9.57
1996	\$9.87

- **Independent Living Rehabilitation** - Instructors provide services to blind Iowans who are ineligible for traditional vocational rehabilitation services because of age or a severe secondary disability. They work with individuals in their home communities and provide instruction in the skills and techniques of blindness. The purpose of the program is to prevent the premature institutionalization of Iowa's older blind and multiple handicapped blind through the provision of in-home assessments and training in the activities of daily living and the development of community support systems.

- **Library** - The Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped has two functions, including circulation and production. Library circulation provides public, school, academic, and business library services to eligible blind, physically handicapped, and reading disabled lowans through the circulation of books and magazines in alternative media, including Braille, cassette tape, descriptive video, electronic text, large print, and recorded disc.

Library production provides for the transcription of print materials into Braille or audio media so that blind; physically handicapped, and reading disabled lowans may pursue educational, employment, leisure, and personal goals.

In addition, when requested, the Department for the Blind works with Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education, to procure books and specialized materials for a number of blind children enrolled in public schools throughout the State.

- **Business Enterprise Program (BEP)** - The Department is the licensing agency for implementing the federal Randolph-Sheppard Act, as amended, and Chapter 216D, Code of Iowa. The federal Act gives blind individuals priority for vending and cafeteria operations in federal facilities, and the Iowa law gives blind individuals priority for vending and cafeterias in State facilities.

As a result, the Program establishes management opportunities for persons who are blind and allows them to demonstrate their abilities and competence through the operation of vending and food service operations. The Department provides initial and ongoing food service and management training, as well as beginning inventory and purchase of equipment.

- **Provision of Special Tools, Devices, and Aids** - The Department makes available a variety of specialized aids, appliances, and recreational items that can be purchased by blind lowans at cost or furnished as part of some individual rehabilitation plans. Some of the items available include white canes for independent travel, Braille and electronic watches and clocks, Braille and print writing devices, and various types of measuring equipment.
- **Maintenance of a Registry of lowans who are Blind** - The Department maintains a registry of the blind in Iowa that shows the causes of blindness, age, and other statistical information that is valuable for program evaluation and planning.
- **Public Education and Information** - The Department circulates booklets and reports throughout the State, and work of the Department and accomplishments of individuals who are blind are publicized through the media. In addition, Department staff will speak before any interested group in the State.

Number of Blind Persons Served - An estimated 6,078 individuals utilized library services during FY 2001. Vocational Rehabilitation contacted approximately 1,000 individuals and Independent Living Rehabilitation contacted over 750. Annually, between 45 and 50 students attend the Orientation Center for training, and more than 500 individuals are assisted with special tools, devices, and products.

Table II outlines the total number of program contacts from calendar year 1985-2000. It is important to note that the numbers in the table reflect total contacts versus individuals served by programs. For example, as mentioned above, 6,078 individuals utilized library services in FY 2001; however, this is lower than the 10,281 reflected in the table because many borrowers use more than one medium and the larger figure accounts for the use of all media. The total number of services provided by the Department for the Blind increased by 26.1% from 1985-2000.

TABLE II
Number of Blind Persons Served by Program

Calendar Year	Library	Vocational Rehabilitation	Independent Living	Business Enterprises	Total Services Provided*
1985	6,796	9,437	1,607	38	17,878
1986	5,799	9,400	2,185	38	17,422
1987	5,872	8,647	2,332	35	16,886
1988	6,178	9,731	2,687	39	18,635
1989	7,242	10,180	2,546	48	20,016
1990	7,882	9,877	1,988	56	19,803
1991	7,982	8,913	2,185	59	19,139
1992	8,000	10,564	2,097	61	20,722
1993	8,000	10,528	2,652	61	21,241
1994	8,729	11,758	2,337	65	22,889
1995	9,126	10,838	1,921	65	21,950
1996	9,690	11,061	2,455	65	23,271
1997	10,903	9,347	3,131	65	23,446
1998	11,729	9,521	3,191	68	24,509
1999	11,804	9,716	2,814	68	24,402
2000	10,281	9,124	3,075	70	22,550

*A participant may be involved in more than one program.
Source: Iowa Department for the Blind

FUNDING SOURCES

The Department receives funding from several sources, including an annual appropriation from the State General Fund that is matched by federal funds, as well as donations and bequests. See **Table III** below for the revenue and expenditure history for the Department's General and federal funding for the past five fiscal years.

Table III
Department for the Blind – General and Federal Funds

	Actual FY 1998	Actual FY 1999	Actual FY 2000	Actual FY 2001	Budget FY 2002
Revenues					
State General Fund Appropriations	\$1,521,371	\$1,611,168	\$1,784,950	\$1,856,993	\$1,830,945
Capitals				122,000	
Sales Taxes			3,273	2,773	3,200
Federal Support	5,169,802	6,076,126	5,531,992	6,247,432	6,602,566
Intra-State Transfers	268,250	348,430	263,905	205,436	171,203
Fees, Licenses	70				4
Refunds and Reimbursements	11,810	45,593	18,346	547	296
Equipment-Salvage			2,374	15	4
Sales	47,876	89,821	87,545	95,891	102,713
Other	2,425	22,488	22,389	23,544	26,000
Total Revenues	\$ 7,021,604	\$ 8,193,626	\$ 7,714,774	\$ 8,554,631	\$ 8,736,931
Expenditures					
Personal Services	\$ 4,035,379	\$ 4,188,328	\$ 4,511,102	\$ 4,700,176	\$ 5,257,246
Personal Travel - In State	127,292	116,614	129,727	148,737	120,287
State Vehicle Operation	22,077	20,774	24,366	28,500	24,124
Depreciation	25,840	44,136	30,500	30,195	52,028
Personal Travel - Out of State	25,255	25,007	26,152	25,824	16,481
Office Supplies	88,873	85,286	106,714	109,713	89,603
Facility Maintenance Supplies	39,404	31,527	78,139	41,951	37,035
Other Supplies		0	2,710	-105	1,004
Printing and Binding	6,619	21,604	3,731	16,713	17,004
Communications	113,074	121,440	112,116	120,885	101,124
Rentals	18,924	32,983	31,306	35,151	35,766
Utilities	79,612	96,694	90,919	117,354	98,738
Professional Services		580	290	0	2,056
Outside Services	367,582	621,982	442,500	895,020	586,784
Intra-State Transfers			3,096	3,218	3,340
Advertising and Publicity	767	3,116	3,418	4,217	2,948
Outside Repairs	80,508	55,982	48,539	114,062	23,285
Data Processing	188,313				
Auditor Reimbursement	7,888	6,985	7,181	9,764	7,000
Reimbursement to Other Agencies	39,726	36,717	63,739	36,173	47,849
Facilities Improvement Reimb.	16,014	17,146			
ITS Reimbursement		3,985	3,766	2,785	3,838
Workers Compensation				5,294	6,799
Equipment	5,816	3,420		15,080	1,226
Office Equipment	9,594	5,494		34,846	3,640
Equipment - Non-Inventory	10,991	87,249	113,720	40,453	24,856
Data Processing Equipment		32,265	24,292	26,957	17,532
Data Processing Equip - Non-Inv.		209,595	50,977	32,837	28,267
Other Expenses	27,564	14,166	12,306	22,003	916
Refunds - Other				23,863	163
Aid to Individuals	1,684,492	2,309,091	1,792,822	1,801,860	2,125,992
Reversions		1,460	646	111,105	
Total Expenditures and Reversions	\$7,021,604	\$8,193,626	\$7,714,774	\$8,554,631	\$8,736,931

Table IV details the disbursement of General Funds, federal funds, and other funds by program for estimated FY 2001.

Table IV
Department for the Blind – Program Funds for Estimated FY 2001

Programs	Estimated Gen. Funds FY 2001	Estimated Federal Funds FY 2001	Estimated Other Funds FY 2001	Estimated Total Program Cost FY 2001
Vocational Rehabilitation	\$1,022,904	\$4,756,176	\$206,171	\$5,985,251
Independent Living	160,769	250,018	20	410,807
Library - Circulation	248,434	492,521	17,561	758,516
Library - Production	176,794	356,220	104,163	637,177
Newsline*	15,000	0	0	15,000
Iowa Radio Reading Service*	15,000	0	0	15,000
Resource Management	218,092	531,145	7,929	757,166
Total Funds	<u>\$1,856,993</u>	<u>\$6,386,080</u>	<u>\$335,844</u>	<u>\$8,578,917</u>

*2001 appropriations are in SF 2452 (Standing Appropriations Act).

FISCAL ISSUES/BUDGET IMPACT

Title I of the Rehabilitation Act provides for vocational rehabilitation services and basic support, and it accounts for approximately 82.2% of the estimated federal funds in the Department's operating budget. The Department was able to match all available federal funds in FY 2000 and FY 2001; however, this was not the case during most years prior to FY 2000.

According to the Department's Maintenance of Effort Requirement, 34 CFR 361.62, the U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration will reduce the amount of the federal allotment otherwise payable to a State by an amount by which the expenditures made from State funds in any given year are less than the expenditures for the second previous year.

The Department received an unspecified General Fund reduction of \$66,000 for FY 2002. As a result, it is anticipated the Department will not be able to match and obtain all available federal funds for FY 2002. The Department may lose between \$165,000 and \$258,000 in federal funds; however, the loss in federal funds is contingent upon how the Department's FY 2002 spending plan is implemented. A \$258,000 reduction in federal funding would assume the entire reduction of General Fund appropriations to the Department is absorbed from the Title I Vocational Rehabilitation Grant that has a match rate of 78.7% federal and 21.3% state.

Another major issue for the Department is rehabilitation services for older lowans who are blind. The total number of referrals to the Department increased from 582 in 1981 to 1,167 in 2000. Older lowans, who are blind, made up the largest portion of the increase, from 56.5% in 1981 to 83.3% in 2000. Given the State's aging population and the prevalence of age-related vision loss in this group, the number of referrals is likely to continue to increase. Without rehabilitation services, older blind lowans are often unnecessarily institutionalized.

OTHER PUBLIC PROGRAMS FOR THE BLIND

There are two other public programs for individuals who are blind, including the education of children who are blind and Supplemental Security Income for those who are blind.

- **Education of Children who are Blind** - In many Iowa communities, children who are blind are educated in their local schools. These children receive assistance through the Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education. In addition, they receive books and materials from the Library of the Department for the Blind, and they may receive assistance from the Department's Vocational Rehabilitation Program to learn alternative techniques or through family counseling.

There is also the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School located in Vinton, and administered by the Iowa Board of Regents. The School provides a statewide elementary and secondary education program for children who are blind or visually impaired. These services, including room and board, are provided at no cost to the child or family.

- **Supplemental Security Income for the Blind** - This program, administered by the federal government through the Social Security Administration, provides cash grants on a monthly basis to persons who are blind and who meet financial guidelines.

STAFF CONTACT: Lisa Burk (Ext. 16765)

Iowa Department for the Blind
<http://staffweb.legis.state.ia.us/lfb/IRVIEW/irview.htm>
LFB:IRLB000.Doc/10/09/01/10:35am/all