

Budget Unit: Department for the Blind

BU Number: 1310J030001

Department Overview

The Iowa Department for the Blind (formerly the Iowa Commission for the Blind), established in 1925, provides services to Iowans that are blind or visually impaired. The services are provided through the Department's three major service areas: Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Independent Living, and the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. An estimated 69,000 Iowans are visually impaired, and of this number, about 10,000 are blind.

Vocational Rehabilitation

The VR program assists blind Iowans in preparing for, obtaining, and retaining employment. Applicants are eligible based on their visual disability, their need for VR services, and their intent to work. A vocational rehabilitation counselor and an eligible individual jointly identify an employment goal and the services needed to achieve it. The VR counselors travel statewide to provide guidance and counseling to blind and visually impaired Iowans to ensure they get the training and services they need to reach their employment goals. The VR program provides:

- counseling and guidance to encourage blind Iowans to achieve their maximum potential.
- funding to help blind students pay for the blindness-specific services and technology to succeed while receiving training at postsecondary institutions.
- advocacy and information to encourage the development of attitudes.
- policies that provide equal opportunity for blind students and workers in training.
- equipment and technical expertise that enable blind students and workers to operate virtually the same information technology as everybody else.

The Adult Orientation Center is a residential training program for clients of the VR program. Located at the Department's central office in Des Moines, the Center provides in-depth blindness skills training to students so that they can return to their home communities to live independently and work competitively in the careers they choose. Students receive training in four areas:

- development of self-confidence
- blindness skills including cane travel, home and personal management, industrial arts, Braille, and computers
- job readiness
- public education

The Department's Business Enterprises Program provides opportunities for legally blind clients of the VR program to manage their own businesses. The blind clients manage a wide variety of food-service operations, including restaurants, coffee bars, vending locations, highway rest area vending sites, and catering. The businesses can be found at federal, state, county, municipal, and private locations throughout Iowa.

Independent Living

Through the Department's Independent Living Program, elderly or multiply disabled persons that are blind learn the skills they need to live independently and participate actively in family and community life. By learning the alternative techniques of blindness, clients can choose the privacy and independence of living in their own homes over moving into care centers. Independent living teachers and service coordinators travel throughout the state to provide training and other services aimed at bolstering the independence of the individual. Training is offered in a variety of forums, including small group sessions held in communities throughout Iowa and in the home on a one-on-one basis. Additionally, staff in this Program provide in-service training to other service providers to meet the unique needs of blind Iowans.

More Information

Iowa Department for the Blind: <http://www.blind.state.ia.us/>

Iowa General Assembly: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/index.aspx>

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Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped

The Library provides reading materials free of charge to lowans that cannot use standard print because of blindness, physical disability, or reading disability. The Library circulates books and magazines on cassette tape and digital media, in Braille, and in large print to eligible borrowers throughout the state. The Library maintains a collection of over 88,000 book titles and makes more than 100 different magazines available to borrowers. Because the Library is a cooperating member of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) of the Library of Congress, borrowers have access to all NLS services.

Individuals that are blind include those with a vision loss that does not constitute legal blindness but is sufficient to prevent use of standard print with ease. Physically handicapped or reading-disabled persons qualify for library service. The library also distributes machines to play recorded books.

Funding

The General Fund appropriation to the Department for the Blind is used to administer the three main services of the Department: Vocational Rehabilitation, Independent Living, and the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. The majority of the General Fund appropriation matches federal funds. Each state dollar provided for vocational rehabilitation services matches \$3.69 in federal funds (21.3% State to 78.7% Federal). These federal funds are subject to a maintenance of effort (MOE) requirement; meaning the state must spend an amount equal to or greater than the second previous year. For example, the MOE state funding level for FFY 2014 must equal or exceed the level of state funding match reported for FFY 2012. If the state does not meet the MOE requirement, federal funds are reduced by the amount of the shortfall. The Department failed to meet the MOE requirement for FFY 2010, FFY 2011, and FFY 2012. There was not an MOE deficit in FFY 2013. For the 10-year period from FY 2005 to FY 2014, the appropriation for the Department for the Blind has averaged \$2.0 million per year.

Related Statutes and Administrative Rules

Iowa Code chapters [216B](#), [216C](#), and [216D](#)

Iowa Administrative Code: [111 IAC](#)