



Department of Rehabilitation Services

At a Glance

Agency: Department of Rehabilitation Services
Commissioner: Amy L. Porter
Established: 2011
Statutory Authority: Public Act 11-44
Central Office: 55 Farmington Avenue, Hartford CT 06105
Web address: www.ct.gov/dors
Total employees: 455
Total expenditures: \$100,173,930 with approximately 79% federal and 21% state funding.

Mission

Maximizing opportunities for people in Connecticut with disabilities to live, learn and work independently. With the addition of Aging Services, this mission is being re-evaluated to include the focus of older adults in Connecticut.

Statutory Responsibility

The Department of Rehabilitation Services provides a wide range of services to individuals with disabilities and older adults who need assistance in maintaining or achieving their full potential for self-direction, self-reliance and independent living. The primary customers of the agency are individuals with disabilities, older adults, and in our employment-based programs we also have businesses/employers as a dual customer.

Legislative authority resides in several different sections of the state statutes owing to the merged history of the agency. They appear in the following sections:

- CGS Secs. 17b -650 to 17b-666, 17b-607 and 17b-612 to 615 - DORS agency statutes and program statutes for the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and the Bureau of Disability Determination (DDS)
- CGS Secs. 10-293 to 10-311a - program statutes for the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)
- CGS Sect 17b-650a – Data reporting requirements for BRS and BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Programs. These requirements are in the process of changing under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
- CGS Secs. 46a-27 to 46a-33b – statutes for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing program
- CGS Sec. 14-11b - statute for the Driver Training program
- CGS Sec. 31-283 - statute for the Workers’ Rehabilitation Services program



- CGS Secs. 17a-302 to 17a-316a, 17b-251, 17b-349e and 7-127b - statutes for the State Unit on Aging (SUA)
- CGS Secs. 17a-405 to 422 State Ombudsman laws

DORS Administration encompasses the Commissioner's Office, as well as the functional areas of legal, legislative, strategic planning, public information/communications, operational readiness, fiscal, IT, facilities and asset management, human resources, payroll and Equal Employment Opportunity. The Department has four programmatic bureaus, including:

- Bureau of Aging Services (Aging)
- Bureau of Disability Determination Services (DDS)
- Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)
- Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)

Our programs, policies and practices are designed to promote employment, independence, equal access, self-sufficiency and self-advocacy.

Public Service

While each program has its own legislative requirements and program effectiveness standards, DORS as a whole focuses on continuous improvement. We continue to work toward building a full complement of metrics to share in this annual report, focusing on our mission of *maximizing opportunities for people in Connecticut with disabilities to live, learn and work independently*. With the addition of the State Unit on Aging, we will be honing our focus to include empowerment, quality of life, advocacy and leadership for older adults.

Major Programs and Highlights of SFY18:

The Bureau of Aging Services

The Bureau of Aging Services (formerly the Department on Aging) was added to DORS with the passage of Public Act 18-169 and is administratively divided into two sections:

The State Unit on Aging administers Older Americans Act programs for supportive services, in-home services, and congregate and home-delivered meals. It also administers programs that provide senior community employment, health insurance counseling, and respite care for caregivers. Further, the unit provides oversight of and leadership for the Coalition for Elder Justice in Connecticut.

- **Elderly Nutrition Program:** The Elderly Nutrition Program serves nutritionally-balanced home delivered and congregate meals, provides other nutrition services and offers



opportunities for socialization to individuals age 60 and older and their spouses. The Elderly Nutrition Program is supported by State and Federal as well as local funds and voluntary client contributions. State and Federal funds are distributed to Connecticut's five Area Agencies on Aging who, in turn, contract with local Elderly Nutrition Projects for meals and nutrition services. In FFY 2017, over 1.87 million congregate- and home-delivered meals were provided. \$2,508,482 was received in State funds for the Elderly Nutrition Program; total funding received was \$12,368,375.

- Connecticut Statewide Respite Program: In partnership with the Area Agencies on Aging and the Connecticut Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, the Statewide Respite Care Program offers short-term respite care to provide relief to caregivers of persons with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. The program provides in-home assessments, the development of care plans and the purchase of necessary respite services. In SFY 2018, \$1,806,138 was received in state funds for this program and 653 individuals received respite services.
- National Family Caregiver Support Program: In partnership with the Area Agencies on Aging, this program offers a range of services that enable caregivers to care for their loved ones. The major components of the program include information about available services, access to supportive services, individual counseling, support groups, caregiver training, respite care and supplemental services. Priority consideration is given to those with the greatest social and economic need. In FFY 2017, \$1,728,457 in federal funds were received to implement these services, 468 outreach related activities were held, reaching 276,203 people and there were 1,263 caregivers who received 38,178 units of caregiver services*.
- CHOICES: Connecticut's program for Health insurance assistance, Outreach, Information and referral, Counseling and Eligibility Screening (CHOICES) is the department's state health insurance assistance program. CHOICES provides objective counseling, outreach and training services in partnership with Connecticut's five Area Agencies on Aging and the Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc. In SFY 2018, certified CHOICES Counselors spent more than 13,800 hours counseling Medicare beneficiaries; more than 8,700 beneficiaries received assistance with Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage plan comparisons and enrollments and more than 4,300 low-income Medicare beneficiaries received Medicare Savings Program (MSP), Medicaid and Extra Help/Low-Income Subsidy application assistance. CHOICES participated in 440 outreach events providing Medicare-related education and information to nearly 15,000 attendees. CHOICES conducted six New Volunteer Training Sessions statewide and 75 in-kind professionals and volunteers became certified CHOICES Team Members. CHOICES



received \$818,154 in state funding (this includes MSP Project funding) and \$481,693 in federal funding.

- Connecticut Statewide Fall Prevention Initiative: The overall objective of the Connecticut Collaboration for Fall Prevention is to reach older adults across the state to reduce the rate of falls and fall-related use of health care services. In SFY 2018, \$376,023 was received in state funds for fall prevention initiatives. 1,508 people residing in northeastern Connecticut were reached through fall prevention presentations and screenings for balance disorders and 161 veterans from 24 towns were screened for fall risk by the Northeastern Health District and Day Kimball Hospital at the Veterans Stand Down. Three home care agencies reached 1,342 individuals attending fall prevention clinics. Data from these agencies indicate that falls were reduced by 60% with an additional reduction in the utilization of each type of related health care service.
- Healthy IDEAS: This community-based depression program is designed to detect and reduce the severity of depressive symptoms in older adults with chronic health conditions and functional limitations through existing case management services. The program targets underserved, chronically ill older adults in the community and addresses commonly recognized barriers to mental health care.
- Benefits Enrollment Counseling Pilot: The National Council on Aging provided \$50,000 in funding for a ten-month pilot to offer benefits enrollment counseling to older adults and persons with disabilities eligible for Medicare who were scheduled for release from incarceration. Counselors were placed within three prison settings in Connecticut with a goal of establishing best practices in assisting this hard-to-reach Medicare population. Fifty-three inmates were screened for benefits and two publications were produced and shared with the Aging and Disability Resource Center network at the national Alliance for Information and Referral Specialists conference in May 2018.
- Coalition for Elder Justice in Connecticut: The State Unit on Aging formed the Coalition for Elder Justice in Connecticut in 2013 as the central focus of the state's Elder Rights/Elder Justice initiatives. The Coalition's mission is to prevent elder abuse and protect the rights, independence, security and well-being of vulnerable elders. The Coalition is a multidisciplinary statewide system of stakeholders partnering to better understand and develop strategies to protect older Connecticut citizens from abuse, neglect and exploitation.

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) provides individual advocacy to residents of skilled nursing facilities, residential care homes and assisted living facilities. The



State Long Term Care Ombudsman also advocates for systemic changes in policy and legislation in order to protect the health, safety, welfare and rights of individuals who reside in those settings.

The LTCOP responds to and investigates complaints brought forward by residents, family members and/or other individuals acting on their behalf. All communication with the residents, their family members or legal guardians, as applicable, is held in strict confidentiality.

There were Federal regulations changes that were implemented in Connecticut during FFY2017. These new regulations provided clarification and interpretation of the Older Americans Act requirements. Conforming to both the Connecticut state statutes and regulations is required by the end of the 2019 legislative sessions.

- Resident Councils - The Coalition of Presidents of Resident Councils is an organization of residents of long-term care facilities who work to improve the quality of care and the services in their homes and effect positive change in larger systems such as state and federal governments. The Executive Board of Presidents of Resident Councils is formed to represent the interests of the Coalition and to develop legislative initiatives.
- Programs - The VOICES forum is an annual event jointly convened by the LTCOP and the Statewide Coalition of Presidents of Resident Councils. It is an opportunity for Presidents of Resident Councils from around the state to gather and discuss issues and concerns in their homes and to provide input into legislative proposals for the upcoming legislative session.
- Volunteer Resident Advocates - Volunteers are trained by Ombudsman staff in residents' rights and problem solving. Volunteer Advocates are asked to spend four hours per week in one assigned nursing home and help residents solve problems or concerns.
- Advocacy- During FFY 2017, the Ombudsman's office received 3,090 complaints; the highest category of complaints fell into the "Resident Care" category. The second largest area of concern was in the "Admission, Transfer, Discharge, Eviction" category. Other advocacy activities include participation in the Long-Term Care Advisory Council, Connecticut Elder Action Network, the LGBT Aging Advocacy workgroup, other stakeholder workgroups and serving as co-chair of the Coalition for Elder Justice.



The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) is the state's lead Bureau for the coordination and provision of services to all Connecticut residents who are legally blind or have significant visual impairments. Founded in 1893, BESB was among the first state programs in the nation for people who are blind.

BESB has four separate service programs which provide a full range of services to clients of all ages who are legally blind or have significant visual impairments:

- The Adult Services Program serves as the central intake for clients and provides independent living training to adults to assist them with maintaining independence within the home and the community. In fiscal year 2018, 473 independent living services were provided to 153 Adult Blind clients (under age 55), and 3,123 independent living services were provided to 758 Older Blind clients (55 and over). Forty-eight clients received Deafblind Community Inclusion grant services.*
- The Children's Services Program provides braille instruction, mobility instruction, adaptive technology devices and training, braille and large print textbooks, and independent living training to children, as well as professional development training and technical assistance to school districts. Over 950 children received services through the Children's Services Program, including preschool services, braille instruction, adaptive technology training, mobility training and expanded core curriculum training. There were 110 students who are blind or visually impaired that took part in BESB's extra-curricular programs - including Skills for Life Mobility Camp, Camp Abilities adapted sports summer program, and Leap into Life transition program.
- The Vocational Rehabilitation Program provides school-to-work transition services to youth who are blind or have visual impairments and assists adults to obtain, retain and advance in employment. The Program also provides technical assistance and job candidate referral services to employers across the state. During FY 2018, 936 clients were served under BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these, 898 were served under an individualized employment plan and 91 clients achieved employment. The average hourly wages for these consumers were \$19.50.*
- The Business Enterprise Program offers entrepreneurial opportunities to people who are blind to manage their own food service and gift store businesses at public facilities. During FY 2018, gross program sales from the vending facilities reached \$5.25 million. There were 33 vending facility operators, who employed an additional 68 workers. Average annual income for the vending facility operators was \$37,621, with five of the locations providing income of more than \$80,000. *



BESB maintains a confidential registry of people who are blind in Connecticut and provides comprehensive independent living services, adaptive aids and devices and volunteer supports, among other rehabilitative services, to individuals of all ages who are legally blind, deaf-blind or visually impaired with a goal of maximizing independence and community inclusion.

Under Statutory requirements, the bureau provides any school district the services of Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments to address the vision-related developmental needs of students who are blind, deaf-blind or visually impaired upon written request. For more information visit www.ct.gov/besb.

Bureau of Disability Determination Services:

The Bureau of Disability Determination Services is responsible for deciding medical eligibility for the Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income programs. These programs provide cash benefits and medical insurance to individuals who are unable to maintain employment due to the severity of their disabilities. 43,209* Social Security disability claims were adjudicated during 2018.

Individuals with disabilities can apply for benefits or inquire about the status of their application by visiting <http://www.ssa.gov/>.

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services strives to create opportunities that enable individuals with significant disabilities to work competitively and live independently. Staff works to provide individualized services, develop effective partnerships, and share sufficient information so that consumers and their families may make informed choices about the rehabilitation process and employment options. For more information visit www.ct.gov/brs.

The Bureau hosts a number of programs:

- The Vocational Rehabilitation Program is designed to help individuals with disabilities to prepare for, obtain, maintain or advance in employment. In FFY 2018, 8,331 consumers were assisted in the BRS Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these 5,985 were served under an individualized employment plan and 1,591 achieved employment. Average hourly wages for those who achieved employment were \$19.10.*
- The Connect-Ability staffing program is designed to connect employers with qualified job seekers. BRS Employment Consultants are strategically located across the state and



can review the needs of businesses, offer qualified candidates and assist in developing training plans before the new trainee/employee starts working.

- The Connect to Work Project allows individuals who receive Social Security disability benefits to better understand the impact returning to work will have on their disability benefits. 296 new consumers met with the Connect to Work Project benefits specialists. 386 individuals received benefits analysis services and 825 follow-ups were completed. There were also 38 presentations and other outreach activities targeting underserved populations, especially youth in transition.
- The Connecticut Tech Act Project increases independence and improves the lives of people with disabilities by making assistive technology more accessible for work, school and community living. 4,400 individuals received Assistive Technology services which include: independent living services, educational assistance and employment support.
- The Employment Opportunities Program enables individuals with the most significant disabilities to engage in competitive employment by providing funding for long-term supports in order to maintain competitive employment.
- The Independent Living Program provides comprehensive independent living services to persons with significant disabilities through contracts with Connecticut's five community-based Centers for Independent Living. In fiscal year 2018, 153 Independent Living Part B clients were served.*
- The Driver Training Program provides evaluation and training for individuals with disabilities who seek to be licensed using a modified vehicle in the state of Connecticut. 308 clients were served under the Driver Training Program during SFY2018. Of these 112 clients completed driver training (some of which included vehicle adaptations), 54 were actively receiving services and 142 had requested services, pending evaluations.
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services include the Counseling Program and the DORS Interpreter Registry. The Counseling Program provides counseling related to special language, communication and socioeconomic problems unique to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. There were 630 Deaf and Hard of Hearing Counseling Services performed during SFY2018 (which may include multiple referrals and services during one session). The department also monitors and posts a statewide Interpreter Registry for all sign language interpreters working in Connecticut in accordance with state statute. There were nearly 400 interpreters listed on the Connecticut Registry at the end of the fiscal year.



- The Workers' Rehabilitation Program assists individuals with work-related injuries to return to the workforce. During SFY 2018, 557 Initial Interviews were completed in the Workers' Rehabilitation Services program. Of these 364 clients achieved employment.

**Please note, some numbers were captured under Federal Fiscal Year reporting, which ran from October 2016 to September 2017*

Additional Information as Required by Statute:

- DORS has a memorandum of agreement for all Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity (AA/EEO) programs and services. Under the direction of the Commissioner, the agency is responsible for ensuring compliance with a wide variety of federal and state laws and department policies that address equal employment and education. Activities related to the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act include investigating grievances as well as determining, documenting and providing reasonable accommodations.
- Affirmative Action Plan: During the reporting period the Affirmative Action Plan was approved without condition. DORS has successfully achieved goals in many categories and classifications, thereby upholding its commitment toward achieving parity in the workforce. The department supports affirmative action and diversity in the workplace and actively seeks applicants from all sectors of the population and takes seriously the commitment to develop a workforce that reflects the diversity of the state and the client population it serves.