



Department of Aging and Disability Services

At a Glance

AMY L. PORTER, Commissioner

Established - 2011

Statutory Authority: Public Act 11-44, 18-169

Central Office: 55 Farmington Avenue, Hartford CT 06105

Web address: <https://portal.ct.gov/ADS>

Total employees: 460

Total expenditures: \$102,358,440 with approximately 74% federal and 26% state funding.

Mission

Maximizing opportunities for the independence and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut.

Statutory Responsibility

The Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) 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 - ADS 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. The Vocational Rehabilitation Programs of the agency have been successfully incorporated into the Unified State Plan under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and performance measures as required by the federal government were included in this plan.
- 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); and
- CGS Secs. 17a-405 to 422 State Ombudsman laws.

Aging and Disability Services’ 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/LTCOP);
- Bureau of Disability Determination Services (DDS);
- Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB); and
- 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, Aging and Disability Services 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 the independence and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut.*

SFY20 had a unique set of challenges presented when the COVID-19 pandemic began the necessity of switching many in-person services to virtual ones in March of 2020. Aging and Disability Services has remained flexible in methods of service provision as well as mindful of the health and safety of consumers and staff as the pandemic developed.

Major Programs and Highlights of SFY20

The Bureau of Aging Services

The Bureau of Aging Services is administratively divided into two sections:

The State Unit on Aging administers federal 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. During the pandemic, congregate meals shifted to "grab and go" or delivered meals when meal sites closed. In April 2020, emergency nutrition funding in the amount of \$8,136,180 was received through Families First and CARES Act to support additional meals needed to meet the increased demand. In FFY19, over 1.88 million congregate and home-delivered meals were provided. \$2,708,524 was received in State funds for the Elderly Nutrition Program; total funding received was \$12,774,511*.
- ***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 SFY20, \$1,809,216 was received in state funds for this program and 799

caregivers and 724 care recipients received respite services through this mutually beneficial program.

- ***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. During the pandemic, Executive Order No. 7NN provided additional support to caregivers by waiving the regulatory limitations on the amount of support that could be provided to caregivers under this program. In FFY19, \$2,074,053 in federal funds were received to implement these services, 434 outreach related activities were held, reaching 265,966 people and there were 1,512 caregivers who received 57,806 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 SFY20, 349 certified CHOICES Counselors spent more than 15,540 hours counseling Medicare beneficiaries; more than 13,967 beneficiaries received assistance with Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage Plan comparisons and enrollments, and more than 11,350 low-income Medicare beneficiaries received eligibility screening, benefits explanation and/or application assistance for the Medicare Savings Program, Medicaid and/or Extra Help/Low- Income Subsidy programs. CHOICES participated in 342 outreach events providing Medicare-related education and information to nearly 13,755 attendees. CHOICES has conducted three New Team Member Training Sessions in SFY20. Two sessions were in-person sessions and one was held virtually due to COVID-19. Sixty-four in-kind professionals and volunteers became certified CHOICES Team Members during this period. CHOICES received \$700,783 in state funding and \$683,626 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 SFY20, \$377,955 was received in state funds for fall prevention initiatives. Through fall prevention presentations, fall preventions screening clinics, and referrals to Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance programs for balance disorders, 679 people residing in northeastern Connecticut were served. Home care agencies in the southern, northwestern and eastern regions reached 497 individuals attending fall prevention clinics. There is a significant

decrease in clients served for SFY20 due to the COVID -19 pandemic and the interruption to programs.

The Connecticut Statewide Fall Prevention initiative has been successful as measured and reported, relative to all other States, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data, <https://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/data/falls-by-state.html> which reports: CT has a low rate of falls in older adults: 23.4% in 2018, down from 26.1% in 2016 and down from 26.5% in 2014. As further comparison, in 2018, the national rate was 28%.

- **Healthy IDEAS:** This community-based 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. There were 201 individuals screened for depression and 26 individuals who received the Healthy IDEAS intervention in FFY19.
- **Coalition for Elder Justice in Connecticut:** 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 Coalition for Elder Justice in Connecticut (CEJC) joined the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program to co-host the VOICES United forum called “Lifting Up Voices” on October 10, 2019. This was a first-time merger of two events - the Ombudsman’s Annual VOICES Forum and the Elder Justice Symposium, joining nursing residents with elder justice advocates to discuss a broad range of issues of importance to older Americans and their advocates. This conference included Keynote Speaker and national leader and expert Robert Blancato from the National Elder Justice Coalition, presentations on legislative updates and effective advocacy and an open microphone and panel discussion. CEJC members, state legislators, service providers as well as older citizens and nursing home residents participated. In all, over 275 people were in attendance.
- **Model Approaches to Statewide Legal Systems Grant:** *The Law Enforcement Training, “Elder Abuse: It’s not just a civil matter anymore – it’s downright criminal!” was held on October 29, 2019. This training was held for law enforcement, first responders and prosecutors, to explore and discuss the criminal aspects of elder abuse. These aspects include recognizing signs of elder abuse, additional factors to consider when responding to calls involving older adults, working with Protective Services for the Elderly, resources available through the Office of the Chief State’s Attorney and the U.S. Department of Justice. For FFY19, \$178,500 in funding was received*.*

Under this Federal Administration for Community Living grant, the Connecticut Law Enforcement Guide: Elder Abuse was completed and published in the fall of 2019. The development of this guide was a collaboration of the State Unit on Aging, the Department of Social Services, CT Legal Services, Western CT Area Agency on Aging and a police lieutenant from the Vernon Police Department. The guide is intended to offer law enforcement personnel, first responders, and others information about the crimes of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The guide provides information on tools, services, and referrals available to assist with investigations covering topics such as: Types of Elder Abuse, Why Elder Abuse Occurs, Indicators of Abuse, Investigative Procedures, pertinent Connecticut statutes and elder law issues that can intersect with elder abuse.

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.

- **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 affect 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.
- **Resident Advocates:** Resident Advocates are volunteers that are trained by Ombudsman staff in residents' rights and problem solving. Resident Advocates are asked to spend four hours per week in one assigned nursing home and help residents solve problems or concerns. This program was paused with the nursing home visitor restrictions brought about with the COVID pandemic.
- **Advocacy:** During FFY19, the Ombudsman's office responded to 3755 complaints*. Since March of 2020 the highest level of concern has been related to the COVID-19 response. COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on long-term care residents and their

rights. The Ombudsman's office has been offering live question and answer sessions weekly through Facebook Live. This has allowed the office to keep residents and family member informed while also gaining an understanding of what is happening from their point of view. Other advocacy activities include participation in the Long-Term Care Advisory Council, Connecticut Elder Action Network, the Inclusive Communities workgroup, other stakeholder workgroups and serving as co-chair of the Coalition for Elder Justice in CT.

Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind

The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) is responsible 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 FFY19, 617 independent living services were provided to 167 Adult Blind clients (under age 55), and 2,775 independent living services were provided to 661 Older Blind clients (55 and over.) Thirty-three 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. Nearly 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 127 students who are blind or visually impaired that took part in BESB's extra-curricular programs - including Skills for Life Mobility Camp, Camp Independence adapted sports summer program, baking and crafts program and Leap into Life college 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 FFY19, 746 clients were served under BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these, 722 were served

under an individualized employment plan and 87 clients achieved employment. The average hourly wages for these consumers were \$18.33*.

- **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 FFY19, gross program sales from the vending facilities exceeded \$5.0 million with gross profits surpassing \$2.8 million. There were 328 vending facility operators, who employed an additional 69 workers. Average annual income for the vending facility operators was \$53,771*.

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.

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.

33,378 Social Security disability claims were adjudicated during SFY20.

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 (BRS) 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.

The Bureau hosts several programs:

- **The Vocational Rehabilitation Program** is designed to help individuals with disabilities to prepare for, obtain, maintain or advance in employment. In FFY19, 6,945 consumers

were assisted in the BRS Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these 4,543 were served under an individualized employment plan and 1,131 achieved employment. Average hourly wages for those who achieved employment were \$21.55*.

- **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. 507 new consumers met with the Connect to Work Project benefits specialists. 189 individuals received benefits analysis services and 346 follow-ups were completed. There were also 18 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 providing access to and acquisition of assistive technology devices and services for work, school and community living. 4,287 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 FFY19, 614 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. 294 clients were served under the Driver Training Program during SFY20. Of these 140 clients completed driver training (some of which included vehicle adaptations), 59 were actively receiving services and 95 had requested services, pending evaluations.
- **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services** include the Counseling Program and the Aging and Disability Services Interpreter Registry. The Counseling Program provides counseling related to special language, communication and socioeconomic challenges unique to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. There were 847 Deaf and

Hard of Hearing Counseling Services performed during SFY20 (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 450 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 SFY20, 522 Initial Interviews were completed in the Workers' Rehabilitation Services program. Of these 380 clients achieved employment.

**Please note, some numbers were captured under the latest full Federal Fiscal Year reporting due to funding source, which ran from October 2018 to September 2019.*

Additional Information as Required by Statute

- Aging and Disability Services has a memorandum of agreement with the Department of Administrative Services 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. Aging and Disability Services 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.