



# 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: 454***

***Total expenditures: \$105,444,676 with approximately 75% federal and 25% 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 Services (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 statutes for the State Ombudsman program.

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, and payroll. Human Resources and Equal Employment Opportunity services are provided by the Department of Administrative Services. The department has four programmatic bureaus, including:

- Bureau of Aging Services;
- 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:

- Deliver integrated aging and disability services responsive to the needs of Connecticut citizens;
- Provide leadership on aging and disability issues statewide;
- Provide and coordinate aging and disability programs and services in the areas of employment, education, independent living, accessibility and advocacy;
- Advocate for the rights of Connecticut residents with disabilities and older adults; and
- Serve as a resource on aging and disability issues at the state level.



## 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.*

SFY21 presented a unique set of challenges when the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the continuation of virtual services. 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, and the transition to more robust in-person services began in June of 2021, as the fiscal year ended. The agency has acted as an integral part of the emergency management structure under the state response framework and helped ensure older adults and people with disabilities had access to emergency information, vaccinations, nursing home and other congregate residents' rights information, elder nutrition services, employment services and more during the pandemic.

### Major Programs and Highlights of SFY21:

#### *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 FFY20, over 2 million congregate and home-



delivered meals were provided. \$2,892,066 was received in State funds for the Elderly Nutrition Program; total federal funding received was \$12,864,755\*.

- ***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 SFY21, \$1,809,216 was received in state funds for this program, with 792 caregivers and 709 care recipients receiving respite services through this 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, 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 FFY20, \$2,117,226 in federal funds were received to implement these services. 244 outreach related activities were held, reaching 247,985 people. 1,448 caregivers received 64,860 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 SFY21, 295 certified CHOICES Counselors spent 12,749 hours counseling Medicare beneficiaries; 13,988 beneficiaries received assistance with Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage Plan comparisons and enrollments, and 12,400 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 199 virtual outreach events providing Medicare-related education and information to 9,763 attendees. CHOICES conducted two New Team Member Training Sessions in SFY21. All trainings were held virtually due to COVID-19. Sixty-eight in-kind professionals and volunteers became certified CHOICES Team Members during this period. CHOICES received \$1,000,783 in state funding and \$702,236 in federal funding.



- ***Connecticut Statewide Fall Prevention Initiative:*** The CT Statewide Fall Prevention Initiative (CSFPI) transitioned its falls program from the Yale Connecticut Collaboration for Fall Prevention (CCFP) in June 2020, as the CCFP ended its long running partnership with the State Unit on Aging. The CSFPI will continue to focus on reaching older adults across the state to reduce the rate of falls and fall-related use of health care services. In SFY21, the CT Healthy Living Collective (CHLC) managed and coordinated facilitation of the Tai Ji Quan Moving for Better Balance program. Due to COVID-19, the majority of TJQMBB classes used a virtual platform. The CHLC worked with each Senior Center and the program instructors to ensure fidelity to the TJQMBB model and to brainstorm solutions that met each Center’s needs and requirements. In total there were 10 Senior Centers representing several CT regions who hosted the TJQMBB program supported through state funds in the amount of \$50,000 for a total of 126 participants.
  
- ***Coalition for Elder Justice in Connecticut (CEJC):*** 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 underwent significant organizational changes in the last year. Due to retirements, the Coalition gained a new leadership team. The Coalition also expanded the membership of the Steering Committee to include more representatives from the private sector, diverse communities, and a variety of disciplines to strengthen efforts to collaborate on elder abuse and elder rights issues. The Coalition has improved its website content, started a monthly newsletter, and established a social media presence to share information about resources available to older adults or caregivers of older adults with Coalition members and the community.
  - **Annual Elder Justice Symposium:** The CEJC hosted the annual Elder Justice Symposium virtually on June 22, 2021 with over 150 attendees. The Symposium’s theme, “Advocating Through Adversity: Celebrating Success in These Challenging Times,” featured keynote speaker, Edwin Tan, MD, followed by an interactive session in which Coalition Members presented case vignettes and engaged the audience to discuss potential solutions to a variety of elder abuse issues using a multidisciplinary approach. The Symposium also included a “slide show” of submissions from Coalition member organizations, featuring the individual successes of our members, highlighting the positive outcomes reached during the pandemic.
  
  - **Collaboration with the Connecticut Bar Association (CBA), Elder Law Section.** In collaboration with members of the Elder Law Section of the CBA, Coalition Co-Chairs, Mairead Painter and Lara Stauning presented at the annual CT Legal



Conference on June 17, 2021. The presentation, “Advocating for Residents in Nursing Homes and Other Facilities” focused on the need for greater legal representation for nursing home and assisted facility residents and the benefit of working with the Long-Term Care Ombudsman’s Office. In addition, the Coalition is developing a virtual educational “Lunch and Learn” series for attorneys, in partnership with the CT Probate Administration and the CBA Elder Law Section, to promote better advocacy on behalf of Conserved persons living in nursing homes.

- **AARP and CECJ Sponsored “Fraud Fighting Fourth Fridays”:** In addition to the Annual Elder Justice Symposium, several Coalition Members partnered with AARP as presenters for AARP’s virtual “Fraud Fighting Fourth Friday Series,” covering topics including Senior Medicare Patrol, the Senior Safe Program and Protective Services for the Elderly.

**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.
- **VOICES:** 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 FFY20, the Ombudsman’s office responded to 4,850 complaints\*. Since March of 2020 the highest level of concern has been related to the COVID-19 response and the rights that were waived at a federal level. There have been significant unintended consequences to the waiving of these rights. The Ombudsman’s office has been offering live question and answer sessions on Facebook Live, which are then posted on our website and YouTube channel. These sessions went from three days a week to once a week in August. Using technology as a resource allowed the office to keep residents and family members 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.

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 FFY20, 399 independent living services were provided to 124 Adult Blind clients (under age 55), and 1,972 independent living services were provided to 507 Older Blind clients (55 and over.) Twenty 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 920 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 89 students who are blind or visually impaired that took part in BESB’s virtual extra-curricular programs -





including Skills for Life virtual travel training camp and Leap into Life virtual 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 FFY20, 710 clients were served under BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these, 705 were served under an individualized employment plan and 56 clients achieved employment. The average hourly wages for these consumers were \$23.34\*.
- **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 FFY20, gross program sales from the vending facilities exceeded \$2.34 million with gross profits surpassing \$1.28 million. There were 26 vending facility operators, who employed an additional 57 workers. Average annual income for the vending facility operators was \$28,035\*.

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, DeafBlind 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, DeafBlind 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.

-34,938 Social Security disability claims were adjudicated during SFY21.

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 FFY20, 5,853 consumers were assisted in the BRS Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these 4,463 were served under an individualized employment plan and 901 achieved employment. Average hourly wages for those who achieved employment were \$23.93\*.
  - **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. 395 new consumers met with the Connect to Work Project benefits specialists. 61 individuals received benefits analysis services and 180 follow-ups were completed. There were also 10 presentations and other outreach activities targeting underserved populations, especially youth in transition.
  - **Student VR Services:** In addition to assisting adults, the Vocational Rehabilitation program also provides students with pre-employment services including tools, training and resources to develop their future potential to work competitively and forge a path to independence. Services include job exploration, counseling for post-secondary pursuits, work-based learning experiences, work-readiness training and self-advocacy. In FFY20, 1,895 students with disabilities were served in the Level Up program and 581 students were served in community work-based experiences
- **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. 5,347 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 FFY20, 233 Independent Living Part B clients were served\*.
- **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 825 Deaf and Hard of Hearing Counseling Services performed during SFY21 (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 462 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 SFY21, 286 Initial Interviews were completed in the Workers' Rehabilitation Services program. 257 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 2019 to September 2020.*

#### **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.