



**The Digest of Administrative Reports to the Governor
Department of Aging and Disability Services
Fiscal Year 2022-2023**

At a Glance

Agency: Department of Aging and Disability Services
Commissioner: Amy L. Porter
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: 363
Total expenditures: \$117,110,585 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.

ADS Administrative Responsibilities

Bureau of Organizational Support

This partially centralized business unit provides a range of fiscal services for the department, including budget preparation and monitoring, accounting, vendor setup, accounts payable and receivables, and asset management.

Human Resources

The Human Resources Division is centralized through the Department of Administrative Services, and available to support Aging and Disability Services by providing technical guidance and support for all the employees of the agency. Human Resources staff are involved in addressing issues which impact human resource management for the agency, through coordination of policy issues, involvement in labor relations activity and, in general, with the objective of ensuring that the quality of human resource service throughout the department remains consistent.



Legislative/Legal

The Legislative/Legal unit is comprised of the agency's legislative liaison and the staff attorneys. The staff attorneys act as in-house counsel on a wide range of issues involving every aspect of the department's work, including researching, interpreting, analyzing, and applying complex and conflicting laws and regulations. They also act as hearing officers and represent Aging and Disability Services in formal administrative and public proceedings. The legislative liaison advises on and coordinates legislative proposals and provides advocacy and representation at the General Assembly on behalf of Aging and Disability Services. The liaison currently serves as the ethics liaison for the agency as well.

Public Information/Communications

The Public Information Office is responsible for all departmental communications. This includes media inquiries, social media and agency websites. The Public Information Office also acts as the conduit for all Freedom of Information Act requests.

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 generally resides in Chapter 319I of the General Statutes in the following sections:

- Part I - General Provisions
CGS §§ 17a-780 – 809
- Part II - Education of, and Services for, the Blind
CGS §§ 17a-810 – 834
- Part III - Deaf, Deafblind and Hearing-Impaired Persons
CGS §§ 17a-835 – 849
- Part IV - Services for the Elderly
CGS §§ 17a-850 – 869



- Part V - Office of the Long Term Care Ombudsman
CGS §§ 17a-870 – 899

And in the following provisions:

- CGS § 7-127b - Municipal agents for elderly persons
- CGS § 14-11b - Driver Training program for persons with disabilities
- CGS § 31-283a - Workers' Rehabilitation Services 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, facilities and asset management, and payroll. Human Resources, Equal Employment Opportunity and Information Technology services are provided in partnership with 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.

Core Values

INTEGRITY: We interact honestly and fairly with all others, adhering to strong ethics, values and principles.

RESPECT: We value and recognize others for their unique skills, talents and contributions, and are considerate in all interactions.

PROFESSIONALISM: We are mindful of our daily conduct and strive to have the highest work standards with a courteous attitude.

OPEN COMMUNICATION: We encourage the sharing of information and knowledge in an accurate, honest and supportive way.

Public Service

While each program has its own legislative requirements and program effectiveness standards, Aging and Disability Services focuses on our mission of *Maximizing opportunities for the independence and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut.*

Major Programs and Highlights of SFY23:

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 aged 60 and older and their spouses. The Elderly Nutrition Program is supported by State and Federal funds as well as local funds and voluntary client contributions. State and Federal funds are distributed to Connecticut's five Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) who, in turn, contract with local Elderly Nutrition Projects for meals and nutrition services. In FFY22*, over 2 million congregate and home-delivered meals were provided. \$ 3,150,349 was received in State funds for the Elderly Nutrition Program (SFY23). Total federal and state funding in FFY22* was \$12,509,407, which supported some of the increased costs to programs. Total American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for congregate and home delivered meals was \$6,911,926. These ARPA funds were allocated in FFY 22*; the AAAs can use these funds through the end of FFY24.

- **Connecticut Statewide Respite Program:** In partnership with the Area Agencies on Aging, 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 assessments, the development of care plans, and provision of case management by Care Managers at the Area Agency on Aging, along with the purchase of necessary respite services. In SFY23, \$1,809,216 was received in state funds for this program, with 682 caregivers and 480 care recipients receiving respite services through this program. Care Managers provided 3,805 hours of case management to caregivers on behalf of care recipients.
- **National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP):** 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, case management, support groups, caregiver training, respite care and supplemental services. Priority consideration is given to those with the greatest social and economic need. Post the COVID-19 pandemic, regulatory limitations were expanded permanently for the amount of support provided to caregivers under this program. In FFY22*, \$2,167,063 in federal funds were received to implement these services. In FFY22*, 1,211 caregivers and 126 older relative caregivers caring for people under the age of 18, received the following amounts of supportive services: respite, 1386 hours of caregiver counseling, 256 hours of caregiver training, and 192 sessions of support groups. There were 725 caregivers who received supplemental services, such as medical related equipment, to enhance their care plans. Notably, caregivers received 59,733 hours of respite services which helped relieve them from caregiving duties. Case management totaling 8,159



hours was provided to caregivers. Public awareness activities of the program reached 245,068 people in FFY22*. Total ARPA funds for the NFCSP totaled \$1,641,489. These ARPA funds were allocated in FFY22* and can be spent through the end of FFY24.

- **CHOICES: Connecticut’s program for Health insurance assistance, Outreach, Information and referral, Counseling and Eligibility Screening** (CHOICES). The department manages CHOICES, the 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 SFY23, 314 certified CHOICES team members spent 12,130 hours counseling Medicare beneficiaries in 19,218 counseling contacts. A total of 13,039 beneficiaries received assistance with Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage Plan comparisons and enrollments, and 11,146 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 374 outreach events (some virtual, some in-person) providing Medicare-related education and information to 23,717 attendees. CHOICES conducted two New Team Member Training Sessions in SFY23. Sixty-six in-kind professionals and volunteers became certified CHOICES Team Members during this period. CHOICES received \$1,024,495 in state funding and \$914,551 in federal funding.
- **Connecticut Statewide Fall Prevention Initiative:** In SFY23 the CT Healthy Living Collective (CHLC) entered its third contract year with the Bureau of Aging Services as the program manager and facilitator of the Tai Ji Quan Moving for Better Balance (TJQMBB) program. The TJQMBB is an evidence-based fall prevention program proven to reduce falls in older adult populations. With COVID-19 in retreat, the TJQMBB program returned to the community with in-person programs held at 18 senior centers statewide and a robust cadre of 18 trainers certified by the Dartmouth Centers on Health and Aging. SFY23 also saw the launch of CHLC’s automated email system for sites to receive monthly program reminders, tips on retention and information regarding program logistics. The Fall Prevention Initiative continues to be supported through state funds in the amount of \$77,324 for a total of 304 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 continues to work toward advancing the rights of older adults and creating awareness to



prevent elder abuse. The Coalition collaborates with public and private partners on elder abuse and elder rights issues. The Coalition continues to improve communications, foster new partnerships and maintain relationships with long-term partners through the Coalition's website, a monthly newsletter, through social media, and the annual Elder Justice Symposium. Members of the Coalition have also partnered with one another on several occasions during the last fiscal year to share information and resources related to the rights of older adults and abuse prevention.

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) provides individual advocacy to residents of skilled nursing facilities, residential care homes, assisted living facilities and now the community. The State Long Term Care Ombudsman also advocates for systemic changes in policy and legislation to protect the health, safety, welfare and rights of individuals who reside in those settings and will be developing a community advocacy program in 2024.

The LTCOP responds to and investigates complaints brought forward by residents, individuals, family members and/or others acting on their behalf. All communication with the residents, individuals and 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.
- **Advocacy:** During FFY22*, the Ombudsman's office responded to 4,278 complaints. The Ombudsman's office continues to work with residents and family members as we recover from the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on our long-term care communities.



Ombudsmen are making in person visits to residents in facilities across the state. The program is also expanding to include individuals living in the community and receiving home care services. 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.

- **Technology:** Technology resources have proven to be a resource that allows the office to keep residents and family members informed while also gaining an understanding of what is happening from their point of view.

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 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.

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 SFY23 108 independent living services were provided to 289 Adult Blind clients (under age 55), and 1,472 independent living services were provided to 463 Older Blind clients (55 and over.) Twenty-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. 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. A total of 974 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 146 students who are blind or visually impaired that took part in BESB's in-person and virtual extra-curricular programs - including Skills for Life virtual travel training camp and Leap into Life in-person and 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 SFY23, 722 participants were served under BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these, 714 were served under an individualized employment plan and 97 clients achieved employment. The average hourly wages for these consumers were \$25.19.
- **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 FFY22*, gross program sales from the vending facilities exceeded \$1.7 million with gross profits surpassing \$900,000.00. There were 21 vending facility operators, who employed an additional 18 workers. Average annual income for the vending facility operators was \$45,700.

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.

33,619 Social Security disability claims were adjudicated during SFY23.

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 FFY22*, 5,099 consumers were assisted in the BRS Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these 3,517 were served under an individualized employment plan and 994 achieved employment. Average hourly wages for those who achieved employment were \$26.52.
- **Level Up:** 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 FFY22*, 2,297 students with disabilities were served in the Level Up program and 473 students were served in community work-based experiences.
- **The Workforce Outreach Team** (formerly Connect Ability Staffing) is a component of the Vocational Rehabilitation program dedicated to preparing and qualifying workers for Connecticut's labor market through the development of in-demand career pathways programming and supports. BRS Workforce Counselors are strategically located across the state in conjunction with the regional workforce development boards and 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. 573 new consumers met with the Connect to Work Project benefits specialists. 484 individuals received benefits analysis services and 1,370 follow-ups were completed. There



were also 68 presentations and other outreach activities targeting underserved populations, especially young adults transitioning from high school to post-secondary education or work, and individuals with developmental disabilities.

- **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. 5,519 individuals received assistive technology services for independent living, educational assistance and employment support. 133 assistive technology related training opportunities were provided, and 144 public awareness activities took place. In addition to the services above, the CT Tech Act Project has collaborated with the State Unit on Aging to deliver a new two-year pilot program called Bridging the Digital Divide to help individuals with disabilities and older adults have access to mobile technology and training to utilize the devices for social engagement, community access, telehealth and to reduce social isolation. The program began in October of 2022 and has connected with over 170 individuals and 31 organizations in Connecticut to help close the divide.
- **The Employment Opportunities Program** enables individuals with the most significant disabilities to engage in competitive employment by providing funding for long-term supports to maintain competitive employment. In SFY23, this program assisted 132 individuals.
- **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 FFY22*, 5,908 distinct services were provided. In addition, 262 Independent Living Part B clients were served.
- **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services** include the Counseling Program, a Human Services Advocate and the Aging and Disability Services Interpreter Registry. The Counseling Program provides counseling services related to special language, communication and socioeconomic challenges unique to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. There were 1083 Deaf and Hard of Hearing Counseling Services performed during SFY23 (which may include multiple referrals and services during one session). The Human Service Advocate provides direct consumer service and technical support for communication access issues. 53 Consumers were served. 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 585 interpreters listed on the Connecticut Registry at the end of the fiscal year.

- **The Driver Training Program** provides assessments and training for State of Connecticut residents with physical disabilities who seek to be licensed to drive a modified vehicle. A total of 224 clients were served during SFY23. Of these, 98 clients completed the program, 50 were actively receiving services, and 76 had requested services.
- **The Workers' Rehabilitation Program** assists individuals with work-related injuries to return to the workforce. During SFY23, 285 initial interviews were completed in the Workers' Rehabilitation Services program. A total of 278 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 2022 to September 2023.*

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.