



Welcome to
The Bureau of
Rehabilitation
Services (BRS)

Consumer Handbook 2025

 **CONNECTICUT**
Aging and Disability Services
Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)



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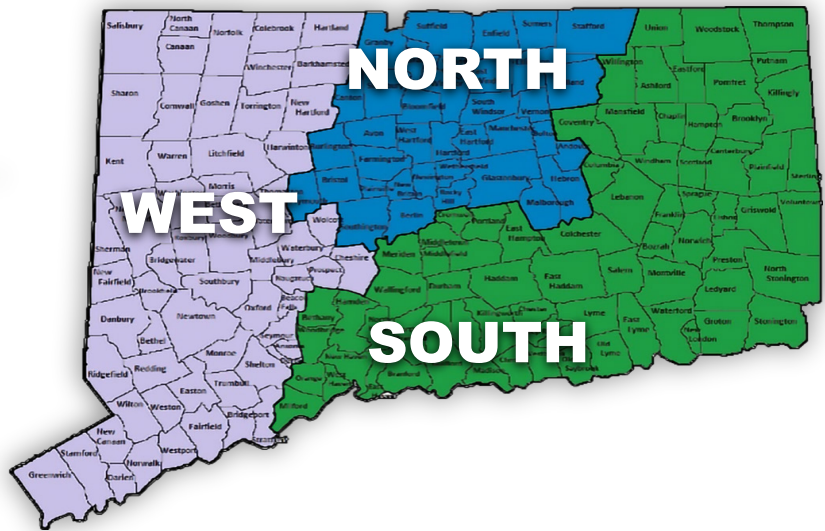
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About the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

Welcome

Thank you for your interest in learning how the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) may assist you. As a federal and state-funded program, we work with you to help you find a job, keep a job, and advance in your job. We also help businesses attract, hire, and retain a qualified and inclusive workforce. The services we provide address barriers to employment due to physical, cognitive, or mental health diagnoses or disabilities.

- **3 Regions**
- **15 Offices**



Mission

To maximize opportunities for people with disabilities in CT to live, learn, and work.

Purpose of This Handbook

This handbook is intended to provide general information about the Vocational Rehabilitation program. It is designed to be a helpful guide for individuals participating in VR services. For detailed policies and requirements, please refer to the policy manual or speak with your counselor.

Who We Serve

Eligible Applicants: If you are eligible for services, our trained staff will work with you to develop an individualized plan for employment (IPE) that matches your abilities, capabilities, interests, and resources available.

Unlike programs such as Medicaid, Medicare, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), BRS is an eligibility-based program, not an entitlement program.

BRS serves all applicants determined eligible. If we are unable to do so, we are required by federal law to enter into what is called an Order of Selection (OOS). Under OOS, all eligible individuals will be served in order of priority while other eligible individuals may go on to a waiting list. That means BRS will first serve individuals with the “most significant” disabilities. OOS can occur if BRS lacks either the funding or personnel needed to serve all eligible individuals.

About our Staff

BRS staff can help you by partnering to:

- Discover and explore a career path based on your interests, abilities, and local labor market information.
- Identify your employment skills.
- Identify strategies, accommodations, or assistive technology that will reduce employment barriers.
- Make informed choices about your plan for employment.
- Coordinate with local resources.
- Provide information on social security work incentives and the impact working has on your benefits.
- Stay in touch once you're employed to ensure your job is a good fit and strategies are effective.

BRS staff includes Bilingual Counselors and Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs) for those consumers who may need them.

What You Can Expect

Confidentiality:

BRS respects your privacy. All personal information about you will be kept confidential. BRS will not give information about you to any individual or organization without your knowledge and signed permission, or in other words, your “informed, written consent”.

Informed, written consent means you know the name of the individual or organization to whom information is to be provided, the purpose or need for providing the information, and the extent or nature of the information to be released. Your information will not be released to anyone without your informed written consent, except when allowed or required by law. Refer to the Application for Services for specifics. (your counselor will review the application in more detail when you apply).

If you are a minor, information may be released to your parents or legal guardians, under the same confidential conditions.

Informed Choice:

Your counselor will discuss available services and who provides them so you can decide which service would be most helpful and who you would like to provide the service to you. This is called Informed Choice. It is your right to make those decisions that are right for you. You can also ask to have these options given to you in writing. For more information about Informed Choice, please visit the **Institute of Community Inclusion website**.

The following are some examples of areas your counselor will discuss with you to help you make an informed choice:

- Assessments needed.
- Your employment goal.
- Service providers for the services outlined in your Individual Plan for Employment.

Information about potential services can include cost, accessibility, duration of services, the qualifications of the providers, the types of services offered by those providers, the degree to which the services are provided in an integrated setting, and as available, information about consumer satisfaction.

There may be times when BRS will not be able to support your choice. For instance, when there are two similar options that will meet your need, BRS is required to select the option with the lowest cost. If you choose the more expensive option, you must cover the difference in cost.

Who Should **Apply**

- Do you want to work?
- Do you have a physical, mental, or cognitive diagnosis or disability that results in barriers to employment?
- Do you believe that vocational rehabilitation services, such as job placement, training, or other job preparation services would help you obtain, retain, or advance in a job?
- Are you willing to make changes in your life that will improve your chances of getting or keeping a job?



Steps of VR Services

To get started, contact a BRS office by phone or by using the “Contact Us” form on our website and request an intake appointment.

If you are working with any other providers, such as the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), Department of Developmental Services (DDS), or others that may provide case management or vocational support, please speak with this agency so they are aware you are contacting BRS.

If you are a student between the ages of 16-22 years who is seeking to learn more about a career, speak with your school staff about pre-employment transition services, which we call “Level Up”. See the pre-employment transition services section (**on page 14**) for more details. The steps listed below (1-5) apply to applicants who are applying for adult services.

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◆ 1. Intake Appointment

During your initial intake appointment with BRS, your counselor will meet with you to review our application and determine if you would like to apply for services.

Plan on sharing and discussing the following over a period of about one hour, in a private location free from distractions:

- Work history
- Educational history
- Benefits information
- Disability diagnosis and impact on employment

Does your disability limit:

Mobility



Communication



Work Skills



Work Tolerance



**Interpersonal
Skills**



Self-Direction



Self-Care

◆ 2. Determining Eligibility

Our goal is to make an eligibility determination within 60 days or less.

⋮ How you can help:

- Complete any forms sent to you.
- Bring Medical/Psychological records.
- Bring SSI/SSDI Workers Compensation Information.
- Provide Names/Addresses of your doctors and service providers.

⋮ How we determine Eligibility:

To determine if you are eligible for services, BRS will need information about you and the barriers you face when at work or when looking for employment. This information can come from you, members of your family, physicians, therapists or others who know about your disability.

⋮ You may be eligible for services with BRS if your disability:

- Creates a barrier for you when attempting to get or keep employment.
- BRS services are needed for you to overcome the barriers that interfere with your success in employment.
- You can benefit from services.
- SSDI/SSI Presumptive Eligibility: If you are receiving social security benefits, it has already been determined that you have a disability that creates a barrier for getting or keeping employment. In this case, your counselor will ask for a copy of your benefits verification letter from social security.

⋮ Once eligibility is determined:

You will receive a notice in writing. In some cases, this process may take up to 60 days. If the condition of your impairment changes, or if you acquire another disability, your counselor will talk with you about these changes and how they impact your ability to work. If it is determined you are no longer able to maintain employment, your case may be closed.

⋮ Trial Work Plan:

Sometimes people are not sure if they are able to work. A Trial Work Plan is an opportunity to explore your abilities, capabilities and capacity to work. If you and your counselor agree a Trial Work Plan is necessary, a detailed plan will be written that outlines why this is necessary, what kind of evaluation is being done, and what services are being provided.

Trial Work Plan may include:

- An evaluation of identified areas of concern you might have through volunteer or work experiences in community settings.
- Trying out different types of support, such as accommodations or assistive technology, in a specific work setting.

Once the Trial Work Plan is completed, your counselor will meet with you to discuss the results. Together you will make the decision on how to move forward.

3. Developing your IPE

An Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is a written document that describes how services will help you toward your employment goal. Both you and your counselor will agree to a realistic job goal for you and a plan for how you will reach that goal.

IPE is a “Joint Plan”
Your ideas + BRS Ideas



YOU play an important role in the Process:

- You have a right and responsibility to make informed choices.
- Work with BRS and do your own research to understand options.
- Understand how your abilities relate to EMPLOYMENT.

In some cases, developing your IPE can take up to 90 days from the date you are determined eligible for BRS services. IPEs need to be reviewed annually, at a minimum. If you need to adjust your IPE at any time, contact your counselor immediately. When you and your counselor agree to a change, an amendment will be written.

Parts of the IPE:

- **Type of Plan:** Your counselor will work with you to decide what type of plan meets your needs. This could include job retention, supported employment, career advancement, or others.
- **Employment Goal:** This should be a job that is consistent with your strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.
- **Services:** List of services that you will require to reach your employment goal.
- **Provider:** The person, resource or agency who will provide the services you need to go to work
- **Progress:** Outline of how progress towards your employment goal will be evaluated.
- **Responsibilities:** Typically, this will include keeping in contact with your counselor regularly and continuing with any ongoing medical or mental health treatment. Other responsibilities may be assigned when the plan is written.
- **Steps:** Actions needed to reach your employment goal and how long it will take you to complete them.
- **Signature:** You and your counselor will sign off on your employment plan and you will be provided with a copy.

Important Considerations:



- Are the time frames for reaching your goal realistic?
- Have other funding sources been explored, when appropriate?
- Are the services consistent with BRS regulations and policies?
- Are the services requested essential toward reaching your goal?
- Does the plan address any treatments or interventions that are necessary to be successful in employment?
- What current support do you have available to you?
- What is your transportation plan for getting to and from work?
- Are sources of payment identified in the plan?
- Does the labor market support your goal?
- If your goal requires a lot of preparation time, can you afford to be unemployed for an extended period while you prepare?
- Will you need longer term supports on the job than what BRS is able to provide?

Potential Services:

Services provided are based on the individual needs of each person that BRS serves.

- **Counseling and Guidance** to provide you with information about employment services and other services that will help you go to work.
- **Assessments or Evaluations** that help you determine your work skills and your need for services, such as training, assistive devices, etc.
- **Job Preparation Services** to help you prepare for work.
- **Job Placement Assistance** to help you look for a job, find a job, and stay on the job.
- **Education and Vocational Training** that will help you learn the skills to do a job, such as college, trade school, or a certification program.
- **On-the-job supports** a job coach that will assist you in learning a job after you begin working.
- **Personal Assistance Services**
- **Home, Vehicle, and Work Site Modifications**
- **Assistance with starting a Business/Self-Employment**
- **Rehabilitation Technology** such as prosthetics or hearing aids.
- **Information and Referral** to other supports, services, or partner agencies in the community.
- **Other Support Services** consistent with the employment goal needed to remove barriers such as textbooks, tools, equipment, transportation.

The services described in this handbook are general examples of the types of services that may be available. The exact name, type, and availability can vary based upon your needs, policies, and available resources.



◆ 4. Following your IPE

You and your counselor will work together, along with your chosen service providers, to identify and pursue work opportunities or services to prepare for, obtain, and/or maintain your employment.

As you begin your employment plan, it will be important to:

- Follow each step of your IPE
- Keep appointments with your counselor and service providers
- Contact your counselor as soon as possible if you are unable to make an appointment
- **Remember, this is a partnership!**

⋮ How long will this take?

Timelines vary depending on individual needs, services required, and job market conditions. Vocational rehabilitation is not designed to be rapid job placement. Instead, it emphasizes sustainable employment through career exploration, skill development, and matching individuals with jobs where they can thrive.

⋮ Who is hiring, and what are the qualifications?

The response to this question varies with each person and depends on the area you live in and the type of job you are seeking. The best advice BRS can give is to work closely with your counselor and the service providers outlined in your plan. By following your plan, you will be a prepared and desirable candidate when the right job opportunity comes along.

⋮ Employment Goal Achieved:

When you are settled in your job, your counselor will verify your employment. It will be important for you to stay in touch with your counselor during this time. Sometimes, once you start working, additional challenges can arise that you might need help with. Your counselor can quickly step in and help you resolve it before it gets too big and help make sure you maintain your employment.

5. Case Closure

You may choose to close your case at any time during the rehabilitation process. Depending on the status of your case, the case can be closed successfully with employment, or without. Once your case is closed with BRS, you will be notified in writing. The case closure letter will include the reason for the case closure, information about your right to appeal against the case closure decision, and the availability of the Client Assistance Program (CAP) to help you. See page 16 for more information on CAP.

Case Closure with Employment

When you are settled in your job, and have worked at least 90 days, your counselor will verify your employment and discuss progress towards case closure, by asking for a copy of a recent pay stub or letter from your employer. This allows BRS to document that you are employed, your job is a good fit, and you are happy with your employment.

Case Closure without Employment

Sometimes BRS closes a case before you become employed. The reasons for this may include:

- You do not keep in contact with your counselor. This means you are not answering calls, texts, emails, or letters from your counselor.
- The severity of your disability worsens, and you are unable to participate in your plan.
- You do not follow through with your plan.
- Your behavior becomes inappropriate, aggressive, or threatening towards any member of the BRS staff.

Special Programs

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

These services are available to qualifying students ages 16-22 interested in developing career awareness and preparedness for competitive and integrated employment through services offered by BRS. This is available through our Level Up program. There are five categories of Pre-ETS:

- **Job Exploration Counseling:** Provides students with the opportunity to learn about different jobs, consider which jobs interest you, and what skills you need to gain to be successful.
- **Work-Based Learning Experiences:** Provides students with activities to learn about the workplace.
- **Counseling on Post-Secondary Education Programs:** Provides students with the opportunity to learn about options for continued education and training after high school or transition programs.
- **Workplace Readiness:** Provides students with the opportunity to learn about and gain skills to be ready for employment. This can include soft skills development, resume services, job seeking skills, and budgeting money.
- **Instruction on Self-Advocacy:** Provides students with the opportunity to learn about and gain skills to advocate for themselves and request any accommodations they need to be successful.

Benefits Counseling

If you are concerned about what happens to your social security disability benefits when you start earning a paycheck, benefits counseling is available. BRS has Work Incentive Counselors on staff who can review your situation and help you make informed decisions about work and your benefits. BRS vocational counselors and benefits counselors do not assist with applying for benefits.

CT Tech Act Project

The CT Tech Act Project provides access to assistive technology (AT) devices and services for work, school, and community living. Assistive technology is any device or tool that helps people with disabilities do things they might not otherwise be able to do independently. It can be something like an ergonomic mouse or visual reminders, to things more like special software to magnify, or read text out loud while reading. AT aims to increase independence and improve overall quality of life for people with disabilities.

Customized Employment

Customized Employment (CE) is a specialized way to find competitive and integrated employment. CE focuses on the strengths, skills, and abilities of individuals with significant disabilities and matches them with the needs of employers. It is a person-centered process for job seekers who may need more support for career and job direction.

Your Rights

As a BRS consumer, you have the following rights:

- You have the right to be told if there will be a delay in BRS services or if BRS cannot provide services. Situations such as these may be caused by a reduction in funding, staff, or openings at facilities or schools.
- You have the right to make informed choices about your IPE.
- You have the right to an annual review of your IPE to see if any changes are needed.
- You have the right to obtain written information from BRS about service options available to you.
- You have the right to review information in your case file if you make the request in writing. However, there are two circumstances when more than your written request will be required:
 - Information that has been provided by other agencies may be disclosed only with their permission.
 - Certain information - such as technical, medical or psychological reports - may have to be provided through a health professional or other representative.
- You have the right to confidentiality.
- All discussions with your counselor are kept confidential. Your counselor will release information in your case file only to those agencies directly involved in your IPE.
- BRS will not release information in your case file to other agencies or people, unless you give your permission in writing.
- BRS will release information in your case file without your written consent only if:
 - Required by federal law or regulation
 - Required by court order.
 - In response to investigations by law enforcement, fraud or abuse.
 - In situations involving abuse, neglect, exploitation or safety to protect you or others.
- You have the right to appeal against any agency decision or action regarding your rehabilitation program.
- You have the right to have someone assist you in the appeals process.

Client Assistance Program

The Client Assistance Program (CAP), which is operated by Disability Rights Connecticut (DRCT), is available to advise and inform individuals with disabilities of the available services and benefits under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and of the services and benefits available to them under Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Some of the services include advising, advocacy and informing individuals of their rights in direct connection with the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

You have the right to access CAP if you want to file a formal complaint about your case. CAP provides you with advocacy and support during an investigation. They can also help you understand what your rights are and provide you with helpful information.

CAP may help you with your BRS case, including to address:

- Disputes about services in your employment plan.
- Disagreements about decisions and actions taken regarding your case.
- Barriers to working with your rehabilitation counselor.

CAP may be able to:

- Support you in choosing options to obtain vocational rehabilitation services.
- Help you review and understand what your choices are regarding services.
- Assist you with understanding your rights according to the Rehabilitation Act.
- Consult with you in developing your IPE.
- Guide you in pursuing legal, administrative or other solutions when a determination has been made that your CAP case has valid merit.

CAP information will be provided to you at application, IPE, and case closure.

About the State Rehabilitation Council

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) works in partnership with BRS to help improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities. SRC members provide advice and guidance to BRS, in formal and informal ways, so that persons with disabilities have a voice in planning and designing the services that lead toward self-sufficiency and independence.

The SRC is made up of persons who want to work with BRS to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Anyone willing to commit to working with BRS may seek an appointment to become a part of the SRC.

The State Rehabilitation Council will:

- Assess the vocational services provided by the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services to individuals with disabilities.
- Improve how BRS, state agencies, and public and private services work together to help consumers succeed.
- Advise the Governor, BRS, and others on ways to improve employment and vocational services for people with disabilities.

The SRC meets six times per year.

Consumers, family members, and others interested in the BRS program can attend SRC meetings to gain information or to share feedback. If you are interested in attending an SRC meeting or becoming a member, please contact the BRS Central Office at 860-424-4840 or video phone 860-920-7163.

Appendix

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
BRS	Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
CT ADS	Connecticut Aging and Disability Services
CAP	Client Assistance Program
CE	Customized Employment
DDS	Department of Developmental Services
DMHAS	Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
DRCT	Disability Rights Connecticut
ICI	Institute for Community Inclusion
IPE	Individualized Plan for Employment
OOS	Order of Selection
Pre-ETS	Pre Employment Transition Services
RCD	Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf
SRC	State Rehabilitation Council
SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation