



June 2008

Inside this Brief

- **What is a Disability?**
- **Department of Human Services**
- **Seniors and People with Disabilities**
- **Vocational Rehabilitation**
- **Health**
- **Commission for the Blind**
- **State Independent Living Council**
- **Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program and State Commission on Children and Families**
- **Local Disability Services**
- **School-Based Disability Services**
- **Staff and Agency Contacts**

Legislative Committee Services
State Capitol Building
Salem, Oregon 97301
(503) 986-1813

Background Brief on ...

Disability Services

Prepared by: Rick Berkobien

Disability services are an array of programs, services, and supports for children and adults with diverse disabilities. Some of these services are required by law, by legal decision, or by state public policy. These services may be operated by the state, counties, private, or nonprofit agencies. Much of the funding for disability services is federal money that flows to states either as matched funding (e.g., Medicaid), block grants (e.g., mental health block grant), federal grants/contracts, or in other ways. The state also allocates considerable funding for disability services and distributes funds to counties that provide many local services. Counties and cities sometimes use local revenues to provide or enhance services for their residents.

What is a Disability?

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, a disability is “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of (an) individual; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment.” Within this broad definition state agencies use specific definitions of disability for each program or service.

Physical or mental disabilities may include contagious or noncontagious diseases and conditions such as orthopedic, visual, speech and hearing impairments, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, mental retardation, mental illness, specific learning disabilities, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (**HIV**) disease (whether symptomatic or asymptomatic), tuberculosis, drug addiction, and alcoholism.

Developmental disability is a disability that originates in childhood that is likely to continue and that significantly impacts adaptive behavior. Developmental disabilities include mental retardation, cerebral palsy, Down’s Syndrome, autism, and other impairments of the brain that occur during childhood.

Department of Human Services

Many disability-related services are provided by the Department of Human Services (**DHS**), the health and human services umbrella agency that administers medical assistance, welfare programs, children’s services, and related programs such as the Oregon Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Program. The DHS primarily serves people with disabilities through Seniors and People with Disabilities

(SPD), the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR), and the Health Division.

Seniors and People with Disabilities

SPD administers programs for seniors and people with physical and developmental disabilities. Most services operate through a network of state offices, county agencies, community mental health programs, community developmental disability programs, and Area Agencies on Aging. These offices provide case management services to people with disabilities. Case managers work directly with individuals to determine eligibility for services, develop long-term plans and acquire needed services, and to gain access to benefits such as Medicaid and food stamps. SPD also administers a general fund program, Oregon Project Independence, that serves individuals who may have mild to significant levels of a disabling condition, and choose to remain in their own homes. Programs that SPD operates include:

- *Medicaid Long-Term Care Services* – community-based programs such as assisted living facilities and adult foster homes, nursing homes, and in-home support programs that assist seniors and people with disabilities to remain in their own homes.
- *Oregon Supplemental Income Program* – provides a small monthly cash payment to aged, disabled, or blind people as required by federal law in order for someone to qualify for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI).
- *Developmental Disability Services* – provides support to almost 16,000 qualified adults and children with developmental disabilities through a combination of case management and services. Adults with developmental disabilities may be eligible for services ranging from supports to help individuals live in their own homes to 24-hour comprehensive services. Services are provided in a variety of settings including group homes, foster homes and the Eastern Oregon Training Center (EOTC). Children with developmental disabilities may be eligible for services ranging from family

support to out-of-home placements. Placements can be to proctor care, foster homes, or residential settings.

- *Developmental Disability Community Programs* – includes case management, residential care, employment services, family support, and crisis services for people with a developmental disability. The state contracts with county governments, which in turn subcontract with community agencies to provide services in group homes, foster homes and in the individual's home, and to offer employment programs.
- *Developmental Disabilities State Facilities* - the state operates the EOTC for 38 people with developmental disabilities. The state also operates 32 group homes for people with developmental disabilities who have severe medical and/or behavioral problems.
- *Disability Determination* – programs conducted for the federal government to determine eligibility for SSI.

Vocational Rehabilitation

The VR has 34 field offices throughout the state to provide vocational services to people with disabilities. Services include vocational evaluation, training, restorative services, transportation, job placement, job supplies, and related services. Services are funded with federal moneys that require state matching funds. The VR also can fund people with severe disabilities, who are not considered employable, in sheltered workshop programs. Federal funds cannot be used to pay for these programs, so General Funds are used.

Health

A part of disability services is Oregon's health care system, especially through the Oregon Health Plan and the Addictions and Mental Health Division. For more information, see the *Oregon Health Plan* and *Mental Health and Addiction Services* Background Briefs.

Commission for the Blind

The Commission for the Blind, which is not part of the DHS, assists eligible blind individuals to be self-sufficient through training in

employment, independent living, and related areas. Training includes rehabilitation services that provide vocational counseling, direct training, job placement assistance, and other employment-related services. The Blind Enterprise Program provides self-employment for blind individuals through ownership and operation of cafeteria and other food vending services in various states agency buildings. The commission's Orientation and Career Center serves people with imminent or recent loss of sight by offering counseling and training. Industries for the Blind are a sheltered workshop program for adults with developmental disabilities, many of who are visually impaired or blind.

State Independent Living Council

The State Independent Living Council (SILC), which is housed within but not part of the DHS, is a Governor-appointed council that promotes the concept that disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to live independently, enjoy self-determination, contribute to society, pursue meaningful careers, and enjoy full inclusion and integration in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of American society. The SILC works closely with the VR, the Oregon Commission for the Blind, and private, nonprofit Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to advise on policies and comment; educate the public and private sector on independent living and advocate for policies and practice; identify independent living service needs; review and evaluate independent living services provided by CILs; facilitate the network of CILs; coordinate information with other disability organizations; and survey consumer satisfaction with existing services.

Due to the fiscal agent relationship between the VR and the SILC, which is mandated in the federal Rehabilitation Act, in order for the Act's Independent Living funds to flow into Oregon, the Title VII Part B funding for and the state General Funds allocated to Independent Living flow through the DHS budget and then to the SILC, who in collaboration with the Commission

for the Blind and the VR, apply them according to the State Plan for Independent Living.

Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program and State Commission on Children and Families

These agencies provide services to people with disabilities. For more information, see the *Seniors and People with Disabilities Services* and *Children's Services* Background Briefs.

Local Disability Services

Many Oregon counties (or multi-county agencies) offer a variety of disability-related services under contract from the state. Counties then contract for many of these services with private and nonprofit agencies. Many private agencies and clinics also provide disability services that are paid for through insurance and fees. Nonprofit organizations, such as Easter Seals, operate in many communities and provide disability-related services funded by donations such as the United Way, government contracts, and/or fees based on the ability to pay.

School-Based Disability Services

Infants and school-age children with disabilities are often eligible to receive ancillary disability-related services such as Early Intervention, specialized schooling (e.g., Oregon School for the Blind), assistive technology, vocational training, and job placement as part of the state's special education system. For more information on these services, see the *Special Education* Background Brief.

Staff and Agency Contacts

James Toews

[Seniors And People with Disabilities](#)

503-945-6201

Linda Mock

[Commission for the Blind](#)

503-731-3221

Stephanie Parrish-Taylor

[Vocational Rehabilitation Services](#)

503-945-6201

Tina Treasure

[State Independent Living Council](#)

503-945-6621

Rick Berkobien

[Legislative Committee Services](#)

503-986-1485