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Background Brief on ...

Disability Services

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, sensory disabilities, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, mental illness, psychiatric disabilities, 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

affects adaptive behavior. Developmental disabilities include mental retardation, cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome, autism, and other impairments of the brain that occur during childhood.

Department of Human Services and Oregon Health Authority

Many disability-related services are provided by the Department of Human Services (**DHS**) and the Oregon Health Authority (**OHA**), the human services umbrella agency that administers long-term services, welfare programs, children's services, and related programs such as the Oregon Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Program. DHS primarily serves people with disabilities through Seniors and People with Disabilities (**SPD**) and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (**VR**). OHA provides health services through the Division of Medical Assistance Programs and mental health and addictions services through its Addictions and Mental Health (**AMH**) 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. 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.
- *Developmental Disability Services* – provides support to over 18,000 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 state-operated group homes. 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.
- *State-Operated Group Homes* – the state also operates 30 group homes for people with developmental disabilities who have severe medical and/or behavioral problems.
- *Disability Determination* – programs conducted for the federal Social Security Administration to determine eligibility for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

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.

Oregon Health Authority: Addictions and Mental Health

A part of disability services is Oregon's health care system through the Oregon Health Authority, especially through the Oregon Health

Plan and the Addictions and Mental Health Division. For more information, see the *Oregon Health Plan* and *Addiction and Mental Health Services* Background Briefs.

Commission for the Blind

The Commission for the Blind, which is not part of 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 state 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 is a sheltered workshop program for adults with developmental disabilities, many of whom are visually impaired or blind.

State Independent Living Council

The State Independent Living Council (SILC), which is housed within but not part of 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) as well as others in the public and private sector to provide education, outreach and support for the SILC philosophy. The SILC co-develops the State Independent Living Plan (SILP) and monitors and evaluates its implementation. To aid in this process, the SILC identifies independent living service needs, reviews and evaluates independent living services provided by CILs and supports the Network of CILs. Coordinating information with other disability organizations, including

surveying consumer satisfaction with existing services, is also a SILC activity.

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* Background Brief and related background briefs on children's topics.

School-Based Disability Services

Infants and school-age children with disabilities are often eligible to receive ancillary disability-related services such as Early Intervention, 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.

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