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Background Brief on...

# Disability Services

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## **Background**

Disability services are an array of programs, services and supports for children and adults with diverse disabilities. These services may be operated by the state, counties, private and/or non-profit agencies. Much of the funding for disability services is federal moneys that flow 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 such individual; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment.”

Physical or mental impairments include (but are not limited to) contagious and 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, emotional illness, specific learning disabilities, HIV disease (whether symptomatic or asymptomatic), tuberculosis, drug addiction, and alcoholism.

## **State Services**

### **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.

The primary DHS programs<sup>1</sup> that serve people with disabilities are Seniors and People with Disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation and the Health Division.

**Seniors and People with Disabilities (SPD)**

SPD administers programs for seniors and people with disabilities. Most services operate through a network of state offices and/or the county Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). State offices provide case management to people with disabilities. Case managers work directly with individuals to develop long-term plans and apply for benefits such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), a federal program that provides monthly cash assistance to people with disabilities who are unable to work. In some parts of Oregon, AAAs, which primarily serve seniors, also contract to provide case management to people with disabilities. Other programs<sup>2</sup> that SPD operates include:

**Medicaid Long Term Care Services** - community-based programs (assisted living centers, adult foster homes), nursing homes and in-home supports (client employed providers, meal preparation) to assist seniors and people with disabilities to remain in their own homes.

**General Assistance** – provides cash grants to very low resources/income, severely disabled adults who must apply for and are expected to receive SSI. The state is reimbursed by the federal government for clients who ultimately receive SSI.

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<sup>1</sup> Almost all DHS programs provide some specialized services for people with disabilities. For example, the Children, Adults and Families Division trains and funds foster care providers for children with disabilities. However, for the purpose of this paper, only DHS agencies that provide larger scale disability-related services are included.

<sup>2</sup> SPD also operates programs like Oregon Project Independence, which serves seniors who may have mild to significant levels of a disabling condition. See Background Brief on *Senior Services* for more information on other SPD services.

**Oregon Supplemental Income Program (OSIP)** – provides a small monthly cash payment to aged, disabled or blind people as required by federal law in order for someone to qualify for SSI.

**Employment Initiative** – provides case management services and equipment for severely disabled clients who need assistance with health care, transportation and related services so they can be considered for employment. The program works closely with Vocational Rehabilitation.

**Developmental Disability Community Programs** – includes case management, residential care, vocational services, family support and crisis care for people with a developmental disability. The state contracts with county government, which in turn subcontract with community non-profit agencies to provide services in group homes, supported living homes, employment training centers, training centers, and regular employment settings where people with developmental disabilities are working.

**Developmental Disabilities State Facilities** – state operated Eastern Oregon Training Center for 65 people with developmental disabilities. The state also directly operates 32 group homes for people with developmental disabilities who have severe medical and/or behavioral problems.

**Disability Determination** – program conducted for the federal government to determine people's eligibility for Social Security Disability Insurance or SSI.

**Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)**

VR has 28 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. 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 Division (HD)**

HD administers the Oregon Health Plan (OHP) and the Office of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OMHAS). For more information on OHP and OMHAS, see the Background Briefs on Oregon Health Plan and Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Treatment Services.

### **Other State Disability–Related Agencies**

There are several other agencies that provide services and supports to people with disabilities. These agencies are not part of DHS.

### **Commission for the Blind**

The Commission 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.

### **Oregon Disabilities Commission**

The Disabilities Commission is primarily an advocacy and referral agency for people with disabilities. The Commission operates the Client Assistance Program, a federally funded

program that advocates for people with disabilities in VR services, the Technology Access for Life Needs Program, that offers information and demonstrations of assisted living technology equipment, and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Access Program, which conducts training/education, technical assistance, referral and coordination of sign language interpreters for state agencies. The Commission also operates the Access Designee Program that monitors overall structural access in Oregon, maintains a network of community-based experts to advise local building officials on structural access and approves building waivers for accessibility.

### **Long-Term Care Ombudsman program and State Commission on Children and Families**

These agencies provide services to people with disabilities. For more information on these programs, see the Background Briefs on Senior Services and Children's Services.

### **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 out 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 (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 (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 Background Brief on Special Education.

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