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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. 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, or 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.

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. DHS primarily serves people with disabilities through Seniors and People with Disabilities(**SPD**), Vocational Rehabilitation (**VR**) and the Health Division.¹

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 and community mental health programs, and Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). 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. Other programs² 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 supports (programs that assist seniors and people with disabilities to remain in their own homes).
- *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 Social Security Insurance (SSI).
- *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, in-home services and employment programs.
- *Developmental Disabilities State Facilities* - the state operates the Eastern Oregon Training Center for 45 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 has 38 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

The Health section of DHS 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.

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 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 is 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 not part of DHS, 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. To this end, the SILC works closely with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the

Oregon Commission for the Blind, and private, nonprofit Centers for dependent Living (CILs) to: advise on Independent Living issues in Oregon, including policy review and comment; educate the public and private sector regarding the philosophy of Independent Living and advocate for its application in policy and practice; identify Independent Living service needs in the State of Oregon; review and evaluate Independent Living services provided by CILs, facilitate the network of CILs; coordinate information with other disability organizations; survey consumer satisfaction with existing services.

Due to the fiscal agent relationship between the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the SILC, which is established in the federal Rehabilitation Act, the Title VII Part B funding for Independent Living and the State General Funds allocated to Independent Living flow through the Department of Human Services budget and then to the SILC for application 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 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 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 (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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1. Almost all DHS programs provide some specialized services for people with disabilities. For example, Children, Adults and Families trains and funds foster care providers for children with disabilities. However, for the purpose of this paper, only DHS programs that provide larger scale disability-related services are included.
2. SPD also operates programs like the Oregon Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Program and Oregon Project Independence, which serves seniors who may have mild to significant levels of a disabling condition. That program will be opening services to younger people with disabilities. See Background Brief on *Senior Services* for more information on other SPD services.