



Office of Children  
and Family Services

# New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB)

June 26, 2023

# OCFS Commission for the Blind

The mission of the New York State Commission for the Blind is to enhance employability, to maximize independence and to assist in the development of the capacities and strengths of people who are legally blind.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is teaching skills to gain a new job or keep an existing job.



# OCFS Commission for the Blind

**Introduction** - The NYSOCFS/NYSCB is one of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs in NYS. ACCES-VR (formerly known as VESID) is the other agency who provides VR services. We are federally-funded and state-operated. NYSCB serves people who are legally blind and may also have other disabilities.

We have offices statewide and partner agencies who provide services in the community such as in the home, on the job, or at school.



# Populations Served

- NYSCB serves legally-blind New Yorkers from birth to end-of-life programs serve children (age 3-22), adults, and older blind (over 55)
- We serve individuals with blindness as well as other disabilities including people with physical, sensory and emotional disabilities
- We also serve people with medical complications resulting in their blindness including diabetes



# What is “Legally Blind”?

- A visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better or stronger eye with best correction (this means that the person must stand at a distance of 20-feet to see what most people see from 200-feet away) or;
- A restricted field of vision of 20 degrees or less in the better or stronger eye (normal field is measured to be 180-degree field). As many as 90% of people who are LB have some useable vision.



# Varying Degrees of Vision Loss

- Moderate Visual Impairment = 20/70 to 20/160
- Severe Visual Impairment = 20/200 to 20/400 or a field of 20 degrees or less
- Profound Visual Impairment = 20/500 to 20/1000 or a field of 10 degrees or less
- Light Perception = ability to perceive the difference between light/dark
- Light Projection = ability to determine source or direction of light
- Total Blindness = complete lack of light
- Counts Fingers



# Visual Impairment/Blindness

- A person who uses eyeglasses or contact lenses to see
- A person with a medical condition that affects vision
- A person with loss of vision that cannot be corrected with glasses
- A person who is legally blind
- A person with total blindness
- Temporary or permanent



# Vision Loss

**Know the Effects and  
Causes of Vision Loss**





# Causes of Visual Impairments

- Common causes of legal blindness include – cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, retinitis pigmentosa, macular degeneration and albinism
- Other causes – congenital reasons, trauma, autoimmune deficiencies (Lyme, multiple sclerosis) and other medical complications



# Macular Degeneration

- An eye disease that causes vision loss
- Macular degeneration causes loss in the center of the field of vision. In dry macular degeneration, the center of the retina deteriorates. With wet macular degeneration, leaky blood vessels grow under the retina.
- Blurred vision is a key symptom.
- A special combination of vitamins and minerals (AREDS formula) may reduce disease progression. Surgery may also be an option.



# Diabetic Retinopathy

- Diabetic retinopathy is a diabetes complication that affects eyes. It's caused by damage to the blood vessels of the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye (retina).
- At first, diabetic retinopathy might cause no symptoms or only mild vision problems. But it can lead to blindness.
- The condition can develop in anyone who has Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes. The longer you have diabetes and the less controlled your blood sugar is, the more likely you are to develop this eye complication.



# Glaucoma

- Glaucoma is a group of eye conditions that damage the optic nerve, the health of which is vital for good vision. This damage is often caused by an abnormally high pressure in your eye.
- Glaucoma is one of the leading causes of blindness for people over the age of 60.



# Cataracts

- Cataracts are the clouding of the lens of your eye, which is normally clear. Most cataracts develop slowly over time, causing symptoms such as blurry vision.
- Cataracts can be surgically removed through an outpatient procedure that restores vision in nearly everyone.



# NYSCB Programs

- **Vocational Rehabilitation** – focuses on obtaining your first job, maintaining employment or securing employment
- **Job Save program** – an individual needs help maintaining their job. NYSCB will assist someone in this situation if their eye doctor determines the person will become legally blind due to a progressive eye condition



# NYSCB Programs

- **Business Enterprise Program (BEP)** – Randolph Sheppard Act, individuals are provided extensive training and supports to operate their businesses in government locations
- **Children's services** – NYSCB begins helping children after early intervention, we provide services which collaborate with school programming, recreation programs, pre-vocational services



# NYSCB Programs

- **Older Blind** – must be 55-years old, services enhance and promote independent living skills, will advocate for the return to the community of individuals in nursing homes who have this desire, assist with discharge planning for hospitals and rehab settings, provide 1:1 instruction in the home environment
- Help people safely return home





# NYSCB Programs

- **Independent Living** – individual who wants assistance with goals in the community, at home



# Adaptive Devices

- Large print – bold pens
- Low vision glasses
- Color & contrast
- Magnification devices
- Lighting & glare control
- Tactile markings
- Talking devices



# Sighted Guide

Do offer your arm for assistance. This is the correct way to escort a visually impaired or blind individual.

Don't push or grab a visually impaired or blind individual. This can cause accidents and be embarrassing.



# More Tips

- Always make your presence known and let person know when you leave
- Offer help, but do not insist
- Always give a description of surroundings including who is present
- Give precise information; especially with directions
- Avoid hand signals or gestures
- When reading material, do so completely and respect confidentiality
- Always return items exactly where you found them; do not leave doors ajar; push in chairs; keep walkways clear of clutter
- Remember guide dogs are WORKING. Do not touch dog or divert dog's attention
- If sighted guide is needed let them take your arm. Do not push or pull
- Be relaxed. It is OK to use words such as “see,” “look,” “watch”



# Reasonable Accommodations

- NYSCB recommends that consumers describe their visual impairment and ask for accommodations when applying for assistance
- Consumers who are visually impaired will most likely require assistance filling out applications
- A reader may be provided to help review the application first



# Julie Hovey

Associate Commissioner

New York State Office of Children and Family Services

Commission for the Blind (NYSCB)

52 Washington Street (Room 201) South Building

Rensselaer, NY 12144

[\(518\) 474-7299](tel:(518)474-7299)

[Julie.Hovey@ocfs.ny.gov](mailto:Julie.Hovey@ocfs.ny.gov)

<http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cb/>

“Seeing possibilities...creating independence”



Office of Children  
and Family Services

# New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB)

**Website:** <http://visionloss.ny.gov>

**Toll Free Phone Number: 1-866-871-3000**



# Information Found On Website

- District Office Location
- Applications for services and other forms
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Programs
- Low vision exams and devices
- Assistive technology
- Equipment Loan Fund
- Eligibility Requirements
- For Employers: Vocational Rehabilitation Program, Legal Information
- State Rehabilitation Council
- Community Resources
- Resources and links
- Brochures & publications
- Contact us





# Helpful Direct Links

**District Office Locations (listing geographic locations served)**

<https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cb/distoffices.asp>

**Application for NYS Commission for the Blind services:**

(English, Spanish, Bengali, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian)

<https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/documents/docsCBVH.asp>

**NYSCB – Independent and Adaptive Living Program:**

[https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cb/indep\\_living.asp](https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cb/indep_living.asp)

**NYSCB – Private Agency Service Providers:**

<https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cb/NYSCB-Private-Agency-Listing.pdf>



## Links to other blindness services provided by NYS Commission for the Blind

**Vocational Rehabilitation:** <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cb/vocrehab.asp>

**Business Enterprise Program:** <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cb/enterprise.asp>

**Children's Program:** <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cb/childrens.asp>

**Youth Transition:** <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cb/transition.asp>

**Summer Recreation Program:** <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cb/summerrec.asp>

**Equipment Loan Fund:** <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cb/equiploanfund.asp>



# Commission for the Blind

## Questions or Concerns??

