

The Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) administers programs that ensure Texas is a state where people with disabilities, and children who have developmental delays, enjoy the same opportunities as other Texans to live independent and productive lives.

Mission: To work in partnership with Texans with disabilities and families with children who have developmental delays to improve the quality of their lives and enable their full participation in society.

DARS administers programs that help Texans with disabilities find jobs through vocational rehabilitation, ensure that Texans with disabilities live independently in their communities, and assist families in helping their children under age three with disabilities and delays in development to reach their full potential.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The DARS vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs help people with physical or mental disabilities prepare for, find or keep employment. The DARS Division for Blind Services (DBS) and the Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS) offer specialized services to help Texans with disabilities find the high-quality jobs or training needed to be successful in school and beyond in order to live independent lives.

DBS offers VR services to Texans who are blind or visually impaired. Transition services assist students to make an effective transition from secondary school to adult life and the world of work.

VR services through DBS include assessments, rehabilitation teaching, counseling and referral, deaf blind services, Orientation and Mobility training, physical and mental restoration, reader services, transportation, technological aids and devices, vocational training and employment assistance.

DRS offers VR services to adults and transition-age youth with a wide variety of disabilities including mental illness, hearing impairment, impairments of arms and legs, back injury, behavioral health, intellectual and developmental disabilities, learning disability, spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury and any other physical or mental disability that prevents a person from finding and keeping employment.

VR services through DRS include vocational counseling and evaluation, vocational training, hearing and medical examinations, physical and mental restoration, assistive and rehabilitation technology devices, employment assistance and follow-up after employment to ensure success.

Business Enterprises of Texas

The Business Enterprises of Texas (BET) is a federally sponsored program administered by DARS Division for Blind Services (DBS). BET collaborates with the DBS vocational rehabilitation (VR) program to identify consumers who are suitable for food service and vending management training and employment.

DBS consumers who are selected to become licensed BET managers earn their personal income from profits produced by their businesses, which are located on state and federal properties. Managers hire and pay their own labor and purchase products for resale.

Businesses managed by BET managers produce more than \$60 million in annual sales. Each manager aims to provide an appealing variety of quality food and beverage choices, including healthy options, in a pleasant environment.

Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center

The Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center (CCRC) is a comprehensive vocational rehabilitation (VR) training facility operated by the DARS Division for Blind Services (DBS). CCRC works in partnership with consumers to help them achieve their employment and independent living goals. The adult residential training facility in Austin offers training in core skills such as Orientation and Mobility, braille, daily living, career development and assistive technology.

The training at CCRC addresses each consumer's specific needs. Services are provided at CCRC and in the community to help the consumer gain independence. VR consumers travel from all corners of the state to receive services at CCRC.

CCRC was named in honor of Judge Criss Cole, who lost his sight while serving as a Marine during World War II. As a member of the Texas House of Representatives and the Texas Senate, he was instrumental in providing services for people with disabilities.

The dedicated team at CCRC is committed to providing a positive environment, which enables consumers to develop a positive attitude toward blindness, core skills and confidence. It is a goal of CCRC for each consumer to be empowered to fully participate in his or her employment, community and society.

Independent Living Services and Centers for Independent Living

DARS Independent Living Services (ILS) promotes the independent living philosophy of consumer control, peer support, self-help, self-determination, equal access, and self-advocacy. The goal is to maximize the empowerment, independence, and productivity of people with disabilities through integration and full inclusion into society.

The services provided by the Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS) may include information and referral, counseling, adaptive aids, telecommunications, vehicle modification and minor home modifications.

The Division for Blind Services (DBS) federally funded Older Blind Independent Living Program provides specially designed services in a variety of settings, including the recipient's home, to meet the needs of adults 55 and older who are blind or visually impaired, and may include training in Orientation and Mobility, Braille, adaptive skills, medication management, and self-care skills.

The Centers for Independent Living (CILs) provide advocacy, information and referral, peer counseling, and independent living skills training. There are 27 CILs in Texas, 15 are funded by DARS, and both DRS and DBS may collaborate with any of the CILs statewide.

With assistance from DRS and DBS employees and CILs, Texans with disabilities can effectively confront barriers and achieve lives of personal satisfaction and independence in their homes and communities.

Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services

Through the Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services (CRS) program, the DARS Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS) provides services for people who have experienced traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) and/or spinal cord injuries (SCIs). The program works to ensure that Texans who have TBIs and/or SCIs receive individualized services to improve their ability to function independently in their home and/or community.

Counselors, consumers and family members work collaboratively to identify rehabilitation goals for the person who has TBI and/or SCI and determine what services the person needs in order to support increased independence. Services may include inpatient comprehensive rehabilitation services, outpatient rehabilitation services and/or post-acute brain injury services.

To receive CRS services, a person must have a TBI and/or SCI that results in impediments to mobility, self-care, and/or communication; be at least 15 years old; be a

resident of Texas; be sufficiently medically stable to participate in treatment; be willing to accept treatment; and not be enrolled in another DRS program.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services

The DARS Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS) Office for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS) works in partnership with Texans of all ages who are deaf or hard of hearing. DHHS works to eliminate societal barriers by increasing access to information and providing effective communication skills that can prevent or reduce isolation for a person who is deaf or hard of hearing.

DHHS maintains a statewide network of community partners, as well as contracted deafness and hearing loss resource specialists, who identify essential training and information based on an individual's specific needs.

Training may include effective communication strategies, hearing loss awareness, and use of assistive technology such as cochlear implants and hearing aids. Hearing loss resource specialists also provide individual assessments in the workplace, school, and elsewhere in the community. DHHS also administers a financial assistance program for people who are deaf or hard of hearing to access the telephone networks.

Through DHHS, consumers can receive advocacy and self-empowerment education, including a program for children between the ages of 8 and 17 who are deaf or hard of hearing; sensitivity training and information for employers and organizations regarding federal and state mandates related to equal access; and training to enhance the skills of current and prospective sign language interpreters.

Through the Board for Evaluation of Interpreters program, DHHS is responsible for testing, rating, and certifying people at various skill levels.

Early Childhood Intervention Services

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) Services is the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C program in Texas that works with families that have children birth to 36 months of age with developmental delays or disabilities.

Most referrals to ECI come from the medical community or directly from families. Other sources include the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, childcare providers and social service agencies.

Infants and toddlers living in Texas may be eligible for ECI services if the child has:

- A developmental delay that significantly affects functioning in one or more areas of development, including cognitive, communication, motor, adaptive and social-emotional.
- A medically diagnosed condition that has a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay.
- A hearing or visual impairment as defined by the Texas Education Agency.

DARS contracts with local agencies to provide ECI services across Texas. Contractors include community centers, school districts, education service centers and private nonprofit organizations. The services are financed through federal, state and local funds; Medicaid; private insurance, and family fees.

Autism Program

The DARS Autism Program works in partnership with local community agencies through grant contracts to provide applied behavior analysis (ABA) services for children with autism spectrum disorder.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, autism is more common than childhood cancer, juvenile diabetes and pediatric AIDS combined. Boys are nearly five times more likely to be diagnosed with autism than girls.

Autism Program services include assessments and ABA treatment services in the home, community or clinic. To be eligible for these services, a child must be between 3 and 15 years old, have a diagnosis on the autism spectrum, and be a Texas resident. When a child needs speech-language therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy or audiology evaluations, the local community agency will refer the child for services.

On September 1, 2014, DARS adopted rules with two applied behavioral analysis (ABA) services for children: comprehensive ABA services for children aged 3 through 5 years and focused ABA services for children aged 3 through 15 years.

Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program

The DARS Division for Blind Services (DBS) Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program (BCVDDP) works together with children who are blind or visually impaired and their families to offer resources so the children can achieve their full potential.

Blindness and severe visual impairments in childhood create unique learning and developmental barriers for employment and independence later in life. The BCVDDP

helps children who are blind or permanently and severely visually impaired from birth to age 22 to work toward achieving financial self-sufficiency and independent lives in their community.

Specialized case management services help eligible children and their families access the medical, social, educational, developmental, and other appropriate services necessary to meet these goals. Direct habilitation services help the children to develop the basic skills and confidence for independence in travel, communication, social skills, life skills, career awareness, and community involvement that are needed to create a foundation for success as adults.

BCVDDP offers a wide range of services that can:

- Assist a child to develop the confidence needed to be an active part of the community.
- Provide support and training to help parents understand the rights and responsibilities throughout the educational process.
- Assist a child and his or her parents in the vocational discovery and development process.
- Provide training in areas such as food preparation, money management, recreational activities, and grooming.
- Provide valuable information to families for additional resources.

As BCVDDP staff members work with the family, they help the child develop the concepts and skills needed to reach his or her goals in life.

Blindness Education, Screening, and Treatment

The DARS Division for Blind Services (DBS) Blindness Education, Screening, and Treatment (BEST) Program provides blindness education, vision screenings, and urgent eye medical treatment services to eligible adult Texas residents.

The mission of the BEST Program is to prevent blindness by providing vision screening services and paying for treatment services for individuals with diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, detached retina, or any other eye disease determined to be an urgent medical necessity by the applicant's eye doctor and DARS.

Texans in need of BEST Program treatment services should apply through their physician or optometrist. The BEST Program is funded with voluntary donations when Texans receive their initial or renewal driver's licenses or identification cards issued through the Texas Department of Public Safety.

Disability Determination Services

The DARS Division for Disability Determination Services (DDS) makes disability determinations for Texans with severe disabilities. DDS works with those who apply for and receive Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits to improve their quality of life. Those benefits include Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Texans with physical and/or mental impairments apply for benefits directly to the SSA. Their application is forwarded to DDS, which determines if an applicant is disabled, according to federal criteria.

DDS obtains evidence from the claimant's own medical sources. Its staff arrange for a consultative examination to obtain additional information if evidence is unavailable or is insufficient to make a medical determination. A two-person team, consisting of a medical or psychological consultant and a DDS disability specialist, make the disability determination. DDS returns the claim to the SSA field office for appropriate action and communication with the claimant. DDS makes the disability determination for SSA, but only SSA can determine who is eligible to receive benefits.

More information about DARS programs and services can be found on the DARS website: www.dars.state.tx.us

The DARS office locator is available on the DARS website:
<http://www.dars.state.tx.us/contact/visitor.shtml>

For questions, compliments or complaints contact DARS Inquiries at 1-800-628-5115 or email DARS.Inquiries@dars.state.tx.us.