

NC Division of Services for the Blind Policies and Procedures Independent Living Older Blind

Deaf-Blind Services

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The NC Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) is committed to effectively serving individuals with hearing and vision loss through each of the agency's programs. Deaf-Blind Services have been offered by DSB since 1975. Services are offered through the ILOB program to deaf-blind individuals to achieve their maximum potential to maintain or regain independence.

Individuals with hearing and vision loss may work with the agency's Deaf-Blind Specialists on goals of improving outcomes and quality of life. Deaf-Blind Specialist services may include advocacy, consultation, education, assessment, technical support, service coordination, training, and more.

North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind follows the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) definition of deaf-blindness which is:

1. Central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with corrective lenses, or a field defect such that the peripheral diameter of visual field subtends an angular distance no greater than 20 degrees, or a progressive visual loss having a prognosis leading to one or both these conditions:
2. Chronic hearing impairment so severe that most speech cannot be understood with optimum amplification, or a progressive hearing loss having a prognosis leading to this condition; and
3. The combination of impairments described in clauses 1 and 2 cause extreme difficulty in attaining independence in daily life activities, achieving psychosocial adjustment, or obtaining a vocation;
4. Despite the inability to be measured accurately for hearing and vision loss due to cognitive or behavioral constraints, or both, can be determined through functional and performance assessment to have severe hearing and visual disabilities that cause extreme difficulty in attaining independence in daily life activities, achieving psychosocial adjustment, or obtaining vocational objectives.

When considering decisions about appropriate referrals for deaf-blind services, case managers will utilize the above HKNC definition. Additionally, case managers are encouraged to refer individuals with suspected hearing loss to the Deaf-Blind Specialist based on functional observations.

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DSB acknowledges that each individual who is deaf-blind is unique. The term deaf-blind encompasses different categories including: hard of hearing-visually impaired, hard of hearing-blind; deaf-visually impaired, and deaf-blind. DSB holds that it is an individual preference as to how a person is identified.

The Deaf-Blind Specialist

The Agency maintains five regional Deaf-Blind Specialists who provide comprehensive services to individuals who are deaf-blind through services in the Agency's Vocational Rehabilitation Program (VR), Independent Living Rehabilitation Program (ILR), Independent Living Older Blind Program (ILOB), and Independent Living Services Program (ILS). Deaf-Blind Specialists provide the support necessary to assist individuals with increasing their level of independence within the home, community and at work. The Deaf-Blind Specialist role involves advocacy, consultation, assessment, technical support, service coordination, training, transition planning, and other individualized services. These Specialists are familiar with Deaf culture, telecommunications, assistive technology, hearing aids, Assistive Listening Devices (ALD), assistive alerting devices, methods of communication, community resources and are fluent in American Sign Language. Deaf-Blind Specialist positions are located in the Asheville, Winston-Salem, Raleigh, Greenville and Wilmington offices. See "Deaf-Blind Specialist Service Areas" in the appendix of the DSB VR policy manual to locate the Deaf-Blind Specialist by county.

The Deaf-Blind & Assistive Technology Program Specialist

The Deaf-Blind & Assistive Technology Program Specialist (DBATPS) is also a resource to service delivery personnel. In addition to managing program policy and procedures, the DBATPS may assist Deaf Blind Specialists with complex cases that present for ILOB services. The DBATPS will provide any updates on hearing aid rate changes. See "Hearing Aid Rate Schedule" in the DSB VR manual for information on hearing aid rates.

Responsibilities of the Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor

The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor (ILRC) will function as the case manager for persons with hearing and vision loss and utilize Deaf-Blind Specialists as support staff to assist individuals with achieving independent living goals.

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ILRC's need to adhere to the following recommendations to ensure quality services:

1. The ILRC shall properly code individuals as deaf-blind in the case management system. On the Case Information Form, the other impairments field should include "hearing impairment" regardless of the degree of loss. When referring to the Blind Register, the appropriate Blind Register hearing impairment code should be used. The ILRC shall acknowledge hearing loss on the Health Check List.
2. The ILRC shall inform all persons with hearing loss of Deaf-Blind Specialist services and make referrals in compliance with informed individual choice regardless of level of hearing loss.
3. The ILRC shall send a referral to the Deaf-Blind Specialist which will include a complete internal referral form, a current eye report, the appropriate mode of communication and an, if available, an audiology report.
4. The ILRC shall complete an authorization in the case management system for Deaf-Blind Specialist direct services to consumers at the same time the Deaf-Blind Specialist referral is completed.
5. The ILRC shall, at their own discretion, authorize recommended direct service hours by the Deaf-Blind Specialist.
6. The ILRC shall strive to make all meetings accessible for persons who are deaf-blind. The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor shall coordinate all meetings to include a sign language interpreter, assistive listening devices, etc., as appropriate.
7. The ILRC shall review all equipment recommendations from the Deaf-Blind Specialist and approve or deny based on need, policy and available resources.
8. The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor shall schedule the Deaf-Blind Specialist to present on the dynamics of hearing loss at all Mini-Centers.
9. The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor shall inform the Deaf-Blind Specialist of the intent to close the case if the Deaf-Blind Specialist is still providing services and develop a plan for the completion of services prior to case closure.

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Responsibilities of the Deaf-Blind Specialist

The Deaf-Blind Specialist will function as a consultant to the Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor and perform the following services as directed:

1. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall serve all persons with hearing loss, regardless of the degree of loss, in compliance with individual informed choice.
2. The Deaf-Blind Specialist may provide education and consultation to family members of persons who are deaf-blind in compliance with informed individual choice.
3. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall have 30 calendar days to accept a referral in the case management system from the date the referral was made. The Deaf-Blind Specialist may reject a referral in the case management system if no contact can be made when at least three separate attempts to contact the consumer throughout the 30 calendar day period have been made.
4. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall have 30 calendar days to complete an assessment once the referral is accepted. The Deaf-Blind Specialist assessment will include, but not be limited to, the following areas: alerting devices, assistive listening devices for daily use, communication preferences/needs, community resources/comparable benefits, deaf-blind summary, equipment, community inclusion, and hearing, as appropriate. The results of the assessment will be documented in the case management system within 15 calendar days from the date the assessment was completed.
5. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall complete Progress Notes in the case management system on all services provided through authorized direct service hours.
6. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall not exceed the amount of authorized hours from the referring ILRC and shall submit an invoice of Deaf-Blind Specialist consumer direct service hours to the referring ILR Counselor at least once a month.
7. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall recommend and assist with facilitating the procurement of equipment as necessary utilizing similar benefits as feasible. Deaf-Blind Specialist shall submit recommended equipment purchases

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including quotes to the ILRC. Installation and training on purchased equipment will be provided.

8. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall present at all Mini-Centers in coordination with the Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor.

9. The Deaf-Blind specialist may serve as a facilitator of communication when individuals present unscheduled and no sign language interpreter is available. Please note that this is not a major function of the Deaf-Blind Specialist and should only be utilized when no other communication options are available.

10. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall close all cases in BEAM immediately after services are completed and prior to the closure of the ILOB case. No cases maintained by the specialist shall remain in open status after the case manager has closed a case.