



# Iowa Department for the Blind

## Strategic Plan

FY2025 – FY2027



Department for the Blind

# Strides in Services for Every Age and Stage

The Iowa Department for the Blind is committed to advancing state agency and community programs to better serve Iowans at every stage of life. By leveraging all its initiatives, IDB ensures that individuals—ranging from our youngest clients to our seniors—can access vital resources, services, training, and programs centered on education, independence, and employment.

## Vision

To be the world's leader in blind rehabilitation services.

## Mission

Empower blind Iowans to be gainfully employed and live independently.

## Guiding Principles

We value blind Iowans therefore:

- We believe in each individual's ability to be independent
- We act with a sense of urgency and responsiveness in serving every individual
- We support each individual's right to informed choices
- We value engagement and independence for individuals of all ages
- We promote a positive attitude toward blindness
- We expect blind persons to achieve their full potential
- We provide opportunities for blind persons to be fully contributing members of their communities

All staff are valued and expected to demonstrate:

- Passion for what we do everyday
- Commitment to make positive differences in the lives of blind Iowans
- Respect for the contributions of each staff member
- Ethical behavior, honesty, integrity and trustworthiness
- Innovative and proactive approaches in serving each client
- Progressive and professional leadership
- Collaboration and teamwork that benefits each individual we serve
- Collaboration with community, local, state and federal partners

## Iowa Commission for the Blind

The Iowa Commission for the Blind consists of three members appointed by the Governor for three-year terms. It determines the policies that will be carried out by the Iowa Department for the Blind (<https://blind.iowa.gov/iowa-commission-blind>).

# Iowa Department for the Blind's Core Programs

## Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

- Determines eligibility, provides and arranges for the provision of VR services to all blind VR clients in the State of Iowa
- Provides itinerant adjustment to blindness training in communities, schools, and workplaces throughout the state preparing blind VR clients for education and employment
- Provide services, training and resources to employers and partner agencies
- Provides opportunities for eligible VR clients to own their own business through the Business Enterprise Program (BEP)

## Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center

- Comprehensive adjustment to blindness training
- Intensive, deliberate practice in non-visual skills using structured discovery methodology
- Building self-confidence and a positive attitude toward blindness

## Young Adult Pre-Employment Transition

- Provides intensive adjustment to blindness training in the areas of living, learning and working to help blind students meet IEP goals in an empowering and supportive environment

## Independent Living Younger and Older Blind

- Younger Blind Program (54 years and younger) and the Older Blind Program (55 years and older) provides tools and training necessary for Iowans experiencing significant vision loss to remain independent and active in their homes and communities
- The programs work to build self-confidence and expand possibilities so that these individuals may reconsider joining the workforce

## Business Enterprise Program

- Provides entrepreneurial opportunities to blind Iowans by giving the operators the skills, capital, and self-confidence to expand their business beyond the program and create jobs
- Under the Randolph Shepherd Act and Iowa Code 216D, the Business Enterprise Program has priority to provide vending services in federal and state buildings
- This program provides the locations, equipment, starting inventory, training, and technical assistance to blind individuals who own and operate their own sole proprietorship or LLC

# Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled and Instructional Materials Center

- Serves as the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled regional library providing a library collection in alternative formats, accessible information, access services, and programs to blind and print disabled Iowans of all ages
- The Instructional Materials Center (IMC) provides centralized, cost-effective, and responsive access to educational materials in braille, large print, audio, and electronic formats to blind and low vision students, preK-12 and post-secondary, across the state of Iowa
- Provides information, resources, and trainings to educators, schools, and organizations in the use of accessible materials

## Assessment

The Department completes several internal and external activities to assess its impact on Iowans and to determine whether the services provided meet the needs of blind Iowans.

- IDB reports vocational rehabilitation service measures quarterly and independent living measures annually to our federal funding agencies.
- IDB's VR program completes a comprehensive statewide needs assessment every three years. This assessment was completed in 2022 and will be completed again in 2025.
- Customer input is solicited continuously. Each year, representatives from the Iowa Department for the Blind meet with members of the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa and the Iowa Council of the United Blind at their annual state conventions.
- The Independent Living Program hosts a quarterly IL Forum to engage stakeholders and obtain feedback on programs and services.
- The library has an active Library Consumer Advisory Committee that provides feedback to the library on patrons' services and programs at a local and national level.
- Our agency participates quarterly in the Olmstead Consumer Taskforce. Their activities support the full inclusion of people with disabilities in housing, employment, transportation, healthcare, independent living and other areas.
- The Director serves on the State Workforce Development Board and is able to get direct input from business leaders regarding their needs.
- Elected Committee of Blind Vendors - Committee's responsibilities include (A) participation, with the State agency, in major administrative decisions and policy and program development, (B) receiving grievances of blind licensees and serving as advocates for such licensees, (C) participation, with the State agency, in the development and administration of a transfer and promotion system for blind licensees, (D) participation, with the State agency, in developing training and retraining programs, and (E) sponsorship, with the assistance of the State agency, of meetings and instructional conferences for blind licensees. (<https://blind.iowa.gov/resources-and-publications/policies-and-guidelines/laws-and-codes/randolph-sheppard-act>).

# Goals and Strategies

## Goal 1: Education

### Strategy 1.1: Improving braille literacy among blind Youth

The Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled is creating programs to improve literacy among blind and low vision children.

#### Action Steps:

- Promote Instructional Materials Center (IMC) services to other state agencies and school districts to raise awareness of accessible educational material resources for students
- Promote and expand virtual and in person family programming focusing on literacy and STEM programming for youth
- Expand and continue to promote outreach programs to communities, public libraries, schools and other organizations in rural and urban areas across Iowa to raise awareness

### Strategy 1.2: Provide innovative and proactive pre-employment transition services

Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers travel the state to meet with transition age youth and provide training in braille, daily living skills, and travel with the long white cane. In addition to building and re-enforcing basic blindness skills, our summer program and weekend retreats include activities to build self-confidence, problem solving skills, social skills, and other essential skills so crucial for success in the workplace.

#### Action Steps:

- Increase participation in weekend retreats and LEAP summer program
- Introduce additional short-term trainings to improve client essential skills and self-confidence

### Strategy 1.3: Ensure students receive timely and accurate educational materials in alternative formats

Ensuring students have accurate and timely textbooks, workbooks, charts, maps, diagrams, and other educational materials in alternative formats is a key component of a free and appropriate public education. Our Library's Instructional Materials Center is continually striving to make this process more effective for students and cost-effective for taxpayers.

#### Action Steps:

- Continue to provide training to para-educators, special education teachers, and other educators in braille and braille standards to increase the number of educators trained and/or certified in braille transcription
- Provide access to accessible educational materials to educators via online library systems and ordering platforms

- Increase awareness within state agencies, school districts and the public of accessibility and promote universal design and inclusion.

### Measures for Goal 1:

- Total number of materials in the library cataloged available for circulation to patrons/students and school districts
- Total number of school districts with signed memorandum of understandings enacted with the Instructional Materials Center
- Total number of visits (viewership and readership) to the library's online resources (blogs, online catalog, online courses)
- Total requests filled for alternative media materials from the library's instructional materials center
- Total number of educators participating in braille education courses offered by the library

## Goal 2: Education

### Strategy 2.1: Ensure that older individuals who are losing vision have the skills and tools they need to remain independent in their homes

Our Rehabilitation Teachers teach older adults who have lost or are losing vision how to cook, clean, travel, access technology, and do other tasks of daily life to remain independent in their homes.

- Teachers connect these individuals with peer support, advocacy groups, and community resources to reduce isolation and maintain community involvement
- Teachers help their clients to use these skills to live full, happy, and independent lives

### Action Steps:

- Continue to expand outreach efforts to raise awareness of older blind services throughout the state
- Increase participation in community-based trainings among clients to promote stronger community integration and support networks
- Continue to innovate by leveraging technology, the use of different communication methods and programming to increase patron access to information and opportunities for connection

### Measures for Goal 2:

- Number of individuals successfully completing their training objectives and exiting the program
- Number of new client referrals

## Goal 3: Workforce

### Strategy 3.1: Bringing forward an underutilized pool of talented and motivated workers.

With proper training and opportunity, blind people can do nearly every job available. However, misconceptions and lack of understanding often make employers wary of hiring blind people. At the same time, employers report that they struggle to find employees who are motivated and possess good problem-solving skills. We work with employers to overcome these concerns and get any assistive technology that they might need. We help these employers find the quality workers they need to grow their business.

#### Action Steps:

- Increase employer awareness of the capabilities of blind workers through networking, presentations, community events, and other employer engagement activities
- Promote the capabilities of blind workers through State Workforce Development Board participation
- Develop opportunities for blind workers to enter registered apprenticeships and industry recognized apprenticeship programs

### Strategy 3.2: Working with WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) partners to make America's Job Centers accessible to blind and otherwise disabled job seekers

Continue to work with partners to make America's Job Center training stations accessible and work at the state and regional levels to help ensure that everyone can benefit from all one-stop job center services.

#### Action Steps:

- Continue and expand education and advocacy around systems and programmatic accessibility
- Participate in local workforce board activities including disability access committees to develop partnerships that both connect clients with high-quality jobs and help local businesses meet their staffing needs

### Strategy 3.3: Improving blind lowans' ability to adapt to technological change in the workplace.

We provide assistive technology training that teaches the underlying concepts of new programs and devices. Focusing on developing the ability to troubleshoot common problems to help our clients deal with the ever-increasing rate of change that will define the workplace of the future.

### Action Steps:

- Increase capacity for technology training by continuing to train and upskill Vocational Rehabilitation teachers to provide basic technology training and better leverage Rehabilitation Technology Specialist time and expertise.

## Strategy 3.4: Increase number of clients participating in post-secondary education and training

### Action Steps:

- Use surveys and other sources to identify current client barriers
- Use orientation and mobility, technology, and literacy assessments to determine client skills gaps and provide disability related skills training to eliminate these gaps

### Measures for Goal 2:

- Average hourly wage at exit.
- Number of clients exiting in employment (this includes only clients exiting after being determined eligible for services).
- Number of measurable skill gains achieved by clients.
- Number of clients participating in post-secondary education or training.

## Key Performance Indicators

1. VR client Average hourly wage at exit.
2. The number of youth program participants in all programs expressed as a percentage of eligible students with disabilities.
3. The number of Independent Living Older Blind Clients reporting that they are able to maintain their living situation and independence within their homes and communities.