

*Report on the Response of the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired to the Impact of the
Aging of Virginia's Population.*

November 14, 2014

The Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) since its inception in 1922 has provided an array of services designed to assist people with visual impairments achieve their maximum level of employment, education and personal independence, despite the loss of vision. The department administers a comprehensive program of services for blind, deafblind and vision impaired citizens of Virginia, and in many instances, people with severe disabilities in addition to blindness. The Older Blind Grant (OBG) is the result of the department's commitment to quality services for senior consumers who are blind, deafblind or vision impaired and has the full support of its advisory board. Drawing on its strong connections to area service providers, community organizations and other human service agencies, the Older Blind Program works to enhance the independence of seniors in Virginia and increase their sense of self-esteem and self-direction in their home communities.

The goal of this program is to provide and arrange for services of a practical nature to enable individuals aged fifty-five or older whose significant visual impairment makes competitive employment extremely difficult to attain but for whom independent living goals are feasible, to gain or maintain independence within the home and community, and adjust to their level of impairment. The provision of comprehensive services enables more individuals to live independently in their homes and communities with maximum self-direction; enables others to avoid inappropriate institutionalization and assists many older blind Virginians in accessing appropriate and necessary community resources and services.

Goods and services provided include: outreach; information and referral; advocacy; visual screening; eyeglasses and low vision aids; assistance with housing relocation; adaptive equipment to assist older blind Virginians to become more mobile and more self-sufficient; guide services for essential access to community resources; transportation; orientation and mobility services; reader/volunteer services; peer counseling; adaptive skills training to assist with daily living activities; and other essential supportive services for independent functioning in the home and community, including local independent living training workshops for consumers and their family members.

An important component of this Independent Living Program is the involvement of consumers in accessing existing programs and services via targeted information and referral assistance. Adjustment counseling, daily living skills training, and low vision services are the most frequently needed services. Daily living skills training is provided to all consumers whose individualized assessments indicate a need for training.

Twenty-two rehabilitation teachers are located in six regional offices across the Commonwealth and serve as the primary service providers and case managers. These staff are responsible for outreach activities, consumer evaluation, program planning, counseling, skills training for personal adjustment and activities of daily living, advocacy, the provision of adaptive equipment, orchestrating peer and family support, information and referral, fiscal management, and case management. These rehabilitation teachers work with 10 orientation and mobility instructors, 2 deafblind specialists and 3 rehabilitation engineers as the team provides a full range of services to Virginian's seniors. Currently, the program is averaging 50 active cases per caseload;

however, actual caseload size ranges from a low of 17 to a high of 88 across the 6 regional offices. The Bristol, Fairfax, Richmond and Roanoke regional offices each have four teachers on staff, while the Norfolk and the Stanton regional offices have 3 teachers each. All regional offices are fully accessible to people with disabilities, and the same services are offered statewide. Variance in service provision depends on many factors, including the referral rate and the prevalence of individuals with multiple severe disabilities. DBVI does not maintain waiting lists in any offices or at VRCBVI. The program is fully staffed; however, the increasing prevalence of seniors with vision loss makes the addition of qualified rehabilitation professionals highly desired. The older blind grant program places its emphasis on adaptive skills of blindness, healthcare and wellness, to include diabetes management and eye health. Additionally, the rehabilitation teachers are mandated reporters who are ever watchful for fraud, abuse and neglect of all consumers.

Within the Commonwealth of Virginia, the population estimate of blind and vision impaired seniors over the age of 55 is 125,000 to 135,000. Many of these seniors have lost their vision due to macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma, and many have secondary disabling conditions and illnesses.

Below is the number of individuals by gender who received services from the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired for the last five state fiscal years (2010 – 2014). The services were provided through two programs within DBVI -- the **Rehabilitation teaching/Independent Living/Older Blind Grant program (RIO)** and the Vocational Rehabilitation program (VR)

SFY 2010 -

Age 60-64

Female = 49 (VR=15 and RIO=34)

Male = 45 (VR=12 and RIO=33)

Age 65-74

Female = 100 (VR=14 and RIO=86)

Male = 49 (VR=10 and RIO=39)

Age 75-84

Female = 202 (VR=1 and RIO=201)

Male = 97 (VR=2 and RIO=95)

Age 85 and older

Female = 303 (VR=0 and RIO=303)

Male = 82 (VR=0 and RIO=82)

SFY 2011

Age 60-64

Female = 84 (VR=27 and RIO=57)

Male = 62 (VR=29 and RIO=33)

Age 65-74

Female = 115 (VR=6 and RIO=109)

Male = 86 (VR=11 and RIO=75)

Age 75-84

Female = 250 (VR=2 and RIO=248)

Male = 85 (VR=2 and RIO=83)

Age 85 and older

Female = 318 (VR=0 and RIO=318)

Male = 74 (VR=0 and RIO=74)

SFY 2012

Age 60-64

Female = 70 (VR=18 and RIO=52)

Male = 63 (VR=19 and RIO=44)

Age 65-74

Female = 126 (VR=11 and RIO=115)

Male = 82 (VR=7 and RIO=75)

Age 75-84

Female = 171 (VR=4 and RIO=167)

Male = 81 (VR=3 and RIO=78)

Age 85 and older

Female = 292 (VR=0 and RIO=292)

Male = 91 (VR=0 and RIO=91)

SFY 2013

Age 60-64

Female = 68 (VR=19 and RIO=49)

Male = 37 (VR=10 and RIO=27)

Age 65-74

Female = 98 (VR=7 and RIO=91)

Male = 87 (VR=12 and RIO=75)

Age 75-84

Female = 177 (VR=3 and RIO=174)

Male = 76 (VR=2 and RIO=74)

SFY 2014

Age 60-64

Female = 69(VR=20 and RIO=49)

Male = 56(VR=19 and RIO=37)

Age 65-74

Female = 100 (VR=7 and RIO=93)

Male = 67 (VR=14 and RIO=53)

Age 75-84

Female = 172 (VR=3 and RIO=169)

Male = 81 (VR=1 and RIO=80)

Age 85 and older

Female = 292 (VR=1 and RIO=291)

Male = 80 (VR=1 and RIO=79)

As mentioned earlier, specialized programming is available in the regional offices to seniors with vision loss for the purpose of increasing their independent living skills. The funding for the Older Blind grant that is used to provide these specialized services to Virginia's aging population who are blind and vision impaired has been basically level funded for the last 4 years. So, unless there are additional funds from either the state or federal sources, DBVI may have to implement a policy whereby the most severely visually disabled individuals are served first, and place those individuals with functional visual limitations, but not as severe as others, on a waiting list. DBVI also anticipates individuals applying for services to have a greater wait time for an initial visit from the rehabilitation professional due to the larger number of individuals on their caseloads. These increases in caseload sizes will also mean a greater period of time in between visits. Caseload sizes and territories make it difficult to provide lessons with a frequency that enhances the consumer's acquisition of independent living and blindness related skills. Currently, a teacher is able to see an individual that is involved in training once every three to four weeks for a one to two hour lesson. With the anticipated increase to the caseload sizes, this time period can easily become six weeks in between visits.

The number of requests for in-service training from outside entities is expected to increase due to the growth in the number of facilities being built to serve and house the growing elderly population. The number of consumers wanting adaptive computer technology is also expected to increase.

During the last three years, the DBVI rehabilitation teaching/independent living program provided services to an average of 1836 older visually impaired Virginians annually. The 3 year average for blind, vision impaired and deafblind consumers served of all ages is 2295. The anticipated increase in the number of older Virginians who experience vision loss may exceed the Department's capacity to provide these services. As this population ages, DBVI is aware that many of these individuals have computer skills and use the computer to take care of much of their personal business. Assistive technology such as screen readers and image enlarging software will need to be used by this population so they can continue taking care of their

personal business with the computer. This population will not only need to be assessed on what is the most appropriate assistive technology, they will also need to be trained on how to use the software most effectively. DBVI currently has a network of tutors that can provide this training. However, it is costly. The current rate is \$45.00 per hour for the actual training and \$25.00 per hour for their travel time plus mileage at the federal reimbursement rate. Especially in the rural parts of the Commonwealth, this training can be a significant amount of money due to the distance that qualified tutors must travel to get to the individual needing the training. The increased availability of high tech solutions will require upgrading the knowledge base for instructional staff.

The Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired administration realizes the number of aging individuals that will need services in the future will grow. For a number of years, requests have been submitted for additional funds to hire professional rehabilitation staff that can provide the needed blind rehabilitation services to this increasing population. These requests may have to continue for funding for additional staff. In addition to this request, DBVI may find it necessary to request additional general funds to supplement the federal Older Blind Grant that addresses many needs of this population group.

The Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired is cognizant of the need to ensure that its web page is accessible. In the design of the agency's web page, it was ensured that it was accessible to speech reader software as well as the larger font size and contrasting colors. From the agency's web page, blind and vision impaired seniors can find links to a number of resources that can provide beneficial information regarding their vision loss and related topics. Before placing these links on DBVI's web page, staff made sure that the resource web pages were also as accessible as DBVI's.

DBVI is fully committed to enhancing livable communities. The RT/IL director is a board member of the Virginia Easy Living Home nonprofit, which promotes accessible and affordable housing that incorporates universal design and visitability. She has served as treasurer of this organization for over 12 years, and also manages a federal grant for the nonprofit.

In Richmond, at the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired Services Division, Headquarters, Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired, and the Library and Resource Center, there are 141 classified employees. Below is information regarding their ages, length of state service and eligibility for retirement.

53 employees are under the age of 50, 43 employees are eligible for a reduced retirement benefit (age 50 = 10 and age 55 = 5), and 24 employees are eligible for an unreduced benefit (age 50 – 64 = 30 and age 65+ = 5). 17 of these employees have over 30 years. 12 employees have over 35 years of state service and 4 employees have over 40 years of service.

Of those qualified for an unreduced benefit, 9 employees are in an administrative support roles; 6 employees are in Training & Instructor roles; Then the remaining are a Program Admin Manager and program Specialists positions. Finally, there are several other long time employees at the Library and Resource Center here in Richmond.

The Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired is utilizing the available financial and staff resources to ensure that the needs of this aging population are met. It is through this diverse range of services that individuals across the Commonwealth are able to continue living to their desired levels of independence. As this population continues to increase, DBVI may not have all of the necessary resources and skilled rehabilitation professionals needed to meet seniors' needs in a timely fashion.

Agency Program and Policy Contact:

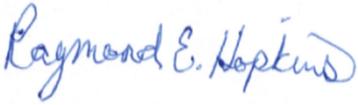
Jane Ward-Solomon

Rehabilitation Teaching and Independent Living Program Director

(804) 371-3140

Jane.Ward-Solomon@DBVI.Virginia.gov

Pursuant to Code of Virginia §§ 2.2-5510 and 51.5-136, the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired submits this report of its progress in addressing the impact of the aging of Virginia's population.

Signature of Agency Head:  Date: 11/14/2014