

**NC DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION**

Section:	D
Title:	Deaf-Blind Services
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The North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) has a responsibility, through the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, to serve individuals with significant disabilities who are deaf-blind. This population has unique needs because of combined hearing and vision loss. Persons who are deaf-blind must have equal access to, and receive, appropriate services in order to reach their highest level of rehabilitative independence within the home, community, and employment.

The agency is committed to serving individuals with hearing and vision loss and maintains specialized staff to provide the exceptional services needed. Specialty staff consist the Deaf-Blind Specialists and Deaf-Blind & Assistive Technology Program Specialist.

North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) 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.

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 (5) regional Deaf-Blind Specialists who provide comprehensive services to individuals who are deaf-blind through services in our 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 finding suitable employment and/or increasing their level of independence within the home. The Deaf-Blind Specialist role involves advocacy, consultation, assessment, technical support, service coordination, training, transition planning, job placement and development, 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 Wilmington, Raleigh, Winston-Salem, Asheville and Greenville offices (On-Line Appendix-Deaf-Blind specialist Service Areas).

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 is an available resource to assist with complex cases that present for VR services.

Referrals for Deaf-Blind Services

The VR, ILR, ILOB, and ILS programs shall refer persons with vision and hearing loss to the Deaf-Blind specialist, using the BEAM *Program Name* Internal Referral – Deaf Blind form. Please include the following when making a referral for Deaf-Blind Services: eye report, audiology report if available, and appropriate mode of communication.

Coding

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Independent Living Counselors must make every effort to properly code individuals with hearing loss as being deaf-blind under primary disability in BEAM. Case Managers referring to the Blind Register will use the appropriate Blind Register Hearing Impairment Code.

Responsibilities of the Deaf-Blind Specialist to the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

The Deaf-Blind Specialist will function as a consultant to the Vocational 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 informed individual choice.
2. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall have 30 calendar days to accept a referral in BEAM from the date the referral was made. The Deaf-Blind Specialist may reject a referral in BEAM 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.

3. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall have 30 calendar days to complete an assessment once the referral is accepted.
4. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall complete and date the assessment in BEAM within 15 calendar days from the date the assessment was completed.
5. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall conduct a deaf-blind assessment to 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, employment, equipment, and hearing, as appropriate.
6. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall not exceed the amount of authorized hours from the referring VR Counselor.
7. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall submit an invoice to referring VR Counselors for processing at least once a month.
8. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall include recommendations to the referring Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor on how to improve employability, independent living skills and overall quality of life. This shall be reflected in the BEAM Deaf-Blind Assessment form.
9. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall complete BEAM Progress Notes on all services provided through consultation hours authorized.
10. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall recommend and assist with facilitating the procurement of Assistive Equipment/Devices as necessary, utilizing comparable benefits as feasible. Deaf-Blind Specialist shall complete the BEAM Equipment/Service Request form for any equipment recommendations including quotes.
11. The Deaf-Blind specialist shall install equipment as necessary and provide training to the individual and/or family on how to properly utilize equipment.
12. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall serve as a facilitator of communication when individuals present unscheduled and no sign language interpreter is available. Please note this is not a major function of the Deaf-Blind Specialist.
13. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall be involved with the job development process. The specialist shall serve at the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor's discretion to educate the potential employer of the dynamics of deaf-blindness and how to successfully work with individuals who are deaf-blind.
14. The Deaf-Blind Specialist may accompany the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to a job site and function as a job coach, mediator, etc. as needed in order to assist a person who is deaf-blind with achieving a successful employment outcome.
15. The Deaf-Blind specialist shall provide education and consultation to individuals who are deaf-blind and their families in compliance with informed individual choice.

16. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall serve active VR cases, including those at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, with priority and shall close all cases in BEAM immediately after services are completed and prior to the closure of the VR case. No cases maintained by the Specialist shall remain in open status after the case manager has closed a case.

Responsibilities of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to the Deaf-Blind Specialist

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are asked to adhere to the following recommendations to ensure quality services are provided to persons who are deaf-blind.

1. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor shall inform all persons with hearing loss of Deaf-Blind Specialist services and make referrals in compliance with individual informed choice.
2. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor shall make a referral to the Deaf-Blind Specialist using the BEAM Internal Referral – Deaf-Blind form simultaneously with the BEAM Authorization Form for this service.
3. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor shall answer all questions on the BEAM Internal Referral – Deaf-Blind Survey section of the Internal Deaf-Blind Referral form.
4. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor shall at their own discretion authorize recommended hours by the Deaf-Blind Specialist to complete deaf-blind services based on the Deaf-Blind Assessment and Progress Reports.
5. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor shall strive to make all meetings accessible for persons who are deaf-blind. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor shall coordinate all meetings to include a sign language interpreter, Assistive Listening Devices, etc. as appropriate.
6. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor shall properly code all persons with hearing loss on the BEAM VR Certificate of Eligibility/Ineligibility form with the primary code of deaf-blindness regardless of the degree of loss. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor shall acknowledge hearing loss on the Health Check List.
7. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor shall review all equipment recommendations on the BEAM Equipment/Services Request form and approve or deny based on need and available resources.
8. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor shall function as the case manager for persons with hearing and vision loss.
9. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor shall utilize the Deaf-Blind Specialist as support staff in order to achieve the goal of employment.
10. The Vocational 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.

Responsibilities of the Deaf-Blind Specialist to the Independent Living Rehabilitation (ILR) Counselor

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 shall have 30 calendar days to accept a referral in BEAM from the date the referral was made. The Deaf-Blind Specialist may reject a referral in BEAM 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.
3. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall have 30 calendar days to complete an assessment once the referral is accepted.
4. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall complete and date the assessment in BEAM within 15 calendar days from the date the assessment was completed.
5. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall conduct a deaf-blind assessment to 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, and hearing, as appropriate.
6. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall not exceed the amount of authorized hours from the referring ILR and ILOB Counselor.
7. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall submit an invoice to referring ILR Counselor for processing at least once a month.
8. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall include recommendations to the referring ILR Counselor on how to improve independent living skills and overall quality of life. This shall be reflected in the BEAM Deaf-Blind Assessment form.
9. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall complete BEAM Progress Notes on all services provided through consultation hours authorized.
10. 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 complete the BEAM Equipment/Services Request form for any equipment recommendations including quotes.
11. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall install equipment as necessary and provide training to the individual and/or family on how to properly utilize equipment.

12. The Deaf-Blind specialist shall 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.
13. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall provide education and consultation to family members of persons who are deaf-blind in compliance with informed individual choice.
14. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall present at all Mini-Centers in coordination with the Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor.
15. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall close all cases in BEAM immediately after services are completed and prior to the closure of the ILR or ILOB case. No cases maintained by the specialist shall remain in open status after the case manager has closed a case.

Responsibilities of the Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor to the Deaf-Blind Specialist

The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselors are asked to adhere to the following recommendations to ensure quality services are provided to persons who are deaf-blind.

1. The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor shall inform all persons with hearing loss of Deaf-Blind Specialist services and make referrals in compliance with informed individual choice.
2. The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor shall make a referral to the Deaf-Blind Specialist using the BEAM Internal Referral – Deaf-Blind form simultaneously with the BEAM Authorization Form for this service.
3. The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor shall answer all questions on the BEAM Internal Referral – Deaf-Blind Survey section of the Internal Deaf-Blind Referral form.
4. The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor shall at their own discretion authorize recommended hours by the Deaf-Blind Specialist to complete deaf-blind services based on the Deaf-Blind Assessment and Progress Reports.
5. The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor 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.
6. The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor shall properly code all persons with secondary disabilities of hearing loss on the IL/ILOB Case Information Form in BEAM regardless of the degree of loss. The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor shall acknowledge hearing loss on the Health Check List.
7. The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor shall review all equipment recommendations on the BEAM Equipment/Service Request form and approve or deny based on need and available resources.

8. The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor shall function as the case manager for persons with hearing and vision loss.
9. The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor shall utilize the Deaf-Blind Specialist as support staff in order to achieve the goal of increased independence.
10. The Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor shall schedule the Deaf-Blind Specialist to present on the dynamics of hearing and vision loss at all Mini-Centers.
11. 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.

Responsibilities of the Deaf-Blind Specialist to the Social Worker for the Blind

The Deaf-Blind Specialist will function as a consultant to the Social Worker for the Blind 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 informed individual choice.
2. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall have 30 calendar days to accept a referral in BEAM from the date the referral was made. The Deaf-Blind Specialist may reject a referral in BEAM 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.
3. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall have 30 calendar days to complete an assessment once the referral is accepted.
4. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall complete and date the assessment in BEAM within 15 calendar days from the date the assessment was completed.
5. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall conduct a deaf-blind assessment to 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, and hearing, as appropriate.
6. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall not exceed the amount of authorized hours from the referring Social Worker for the Blind.
7. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall submit an invoice to the referring Social Worker for the Blind for processing at least once a month.
8. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall include recommendations to the referring Social Worker for the Blind on how to improve independent living skills and overall quality of life. This shall be reflected in the BEAM Deaf-Blind Assessment form.
9. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall complete BEAM Progress Notes on all services provided

through consultation hours authorized.

10. 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 complete the BEAM Equipment/Services Request form for any equipment recommendations including quotes.
11. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall install equipment as necessary and provide training to the individual and/or family on how to properly utilize equipment.
12. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall provide education and consultation to family members of persons who are deaf-blind in compliance with informed individual choice.
13. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall close all cases in BEAM immediately after services are completed and prior to the closure of the ILS case. No cases maintained by the specialist shall remain in open status after the case manager has closed a case.

Responsibilities of the Social Worker for the Blind

The Social Workers for the Blind are asked to adhere to the following recommendations to ensure quality services are provided to persons who are deaf-blind.

1. The Social Worker for the Blind shall inform all persons with hearing loss of Deaf-Blind Specialist services and make referrals in compliance with informed individual choice.
2. The Social Worker for the Blind shall make a referral to the Deaf-Blind Specialist using the BEAM Internal Referral – Deaf-Blind form simultaneously with the BEAM Authorization Form for this service.
3. The Social Worker for the Blind shall answer all questions on the BEAM Internal Referral – Deaf-Blind Survey section of the Internal Deaf-Blind Referral form.
4. The Social Worker for the Blind shall at their own discretion authorize recommended hours by the Deaf-Blind Specialist to complete deaf-blind services based on the Deaf-Blind Assessment and Progress Reports.
5. The Social Worker for the Blind shall strive to make all meetings accessible for persons who are deaf-blind. The Social Worker for the Blind shall coordinate all meetings to include a sign language interpreter, assistive listening devices, etc., as appropriate.
6. The Social Worker for the Blind shall review all equipment recommendations on the BEAM Equipment/Service Request form and approve or deny based on need and available resources.
7. The Social Worker for the Blind shall function as the case manager for persons with hearing and vision loss.
8. The Social Worker for the Blind shall utilize the Deaf-Blind Specialist as support staff in order to achieve the goal of increased independence.

9. The Social Worker for the Blind 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.

Collaboration with Other Agencies and Vendors

DSB staff may collaborate with community partners to best meet the needs of complex cases. In specific cases, DSB may utilize the services of private vendors to meet unique needs of individuals who are deaf-blind. Prior to seeking external resources, DSB staff is encouraged to fully utilize the services of the Deaf-Blind Specialist. A decision to seek supplemental services should be made in consultation with the Deaf-Blind Specialist, immediate supervisor and the Deaf-Blind & Assistive Technology Program Specialist.

One such community partner is the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults (HKNC). The HKNC is a nationally recognized program designed to meet the diverse needs of persons who are Deaf-Blind. This residential Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program offers evaluation, vocational skills training, adaptive technology and computer skills, orientation and mobility, independent living, appropriate modes of communication, speech-language skills, creative arts, fitness, and leisure activities. The curriculum is community-based and the trans-disciplinary team works together to support eligible individuals in achieving employment outcomes.

Individual training programs are based on individual preferences, future goals and training recommendations identified by the individual and trans-disciplinary team. HKNC also offers assistance with vocational and residential placement at the end of the training program.

The majority of individuals who are deaf-blind and require facility-based training will receive training at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind (RCB). In such instances when the individual needs are too great to receive services from the RCB, the HKNC will be considered, as appropriate even if services have previously been received at RCB. Referrals to the HKNC do not obligate DSB for funding. Each referral to the HKNC will be examined on a case by case basis to determine the extent of the Agency's participation, if any. Examples of needs exceeding the capacity of the RCB include, but are not limited to, individuals with no formal language, individuals who cannot adequately communicate their needs, individuals with behavior problems that may potentially compromise the safety of RCB participants, or when instructional services and consumer support service needs cannot be met.

Vocational potential is required at the time of referral on all referrals to the HKNC. If no vocational potential exists, then the referral is not appropriate. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor shall assist the referral in identifying other resources.

All referrals to the HKNC shall go through the Deaf-Blind Specialist and the Deaf-Blind & Assistive Technology Program Specialist. The Deaf-Blind Specialist will conduct an assessment and serve as a resource to the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, while the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor maintains the authority and responsibility for developing the IPE with the individual, if the individual is approved for the HKNC program. The Deaf-Blind Specialist shall also be responsible for conducting person-centered planning and developing a plan of action to be implemented, with the full intent of assisting the individual with obtaining and maintaining employment upon the completion of the program. In such cases when the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Deaf-Blind Specialist, and individual cannot determine which program can best meet the needs, the Deaf-Blind & Assistive Technology Program Specialist shall be utilized.

After the application for services has been completed, a copy will be sent to the Deaf-Blind & Assistive Technology Program Specialist, who will maintain a database of all referrals to the HKNC.

When DSB sponsors HKNC training, the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will authorize for services from their individual caseload budgets regardless of economic need. Contact the HKNC to obtain the current rates for the program. Once an individual is approved to attend, an application from HKNC may be obtained by contacting 516-944-8900.