



## CONTINUUM OF CARE FOR VETERANS AND SERVICEMEMBERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

In FY 2009, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) became the first national health care system to integrate rehabilitation services for patients with visual impairment seamlessly and completely into its health benefits, providing rehabilitation care to Veterans and Servicemembers with visual impairments ranging from mild visual impairment to total blindness. This seamless service integration ensures that patients receive the finest medical and rehabilitation care, as well as cutting-edge assistive technology. The goal is to provide early intervention and to maximize adjustment, independence, and quality of life.

### CONTINUUM OF CARE

The Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS) continuum of care ensures early intervention for patients whose vision loss results from progressive diseases like age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma, as well as those Veterans and Servicemembers whose vision loss results from the wounds and trauma of war.



### IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS AND SERVICEMEMBERS

The continuum of care expands capacity to care for a growing number of Veterans and Servicemembers returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan

who have developed visual impairment and blindness.

In order to assure that younger Veterans and Servicemembers who are transitioning from active duty receive seamless care, Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists (BROS) are assigned to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and to all VA Polytrauma Centers and facilities.

### BLIND REHABILITATION SERVICE (BRS) CARE SYSTEM

BRS is a tiered system of care that aligns closely with VA optometry, ophthalmology, and the Department of Defense Vision Center of Excellence.

When basic low vision care provided in VA optometry and ophthalmology clinics is no longer sufficient, Veterans and Servicemembers may receive clinical rehabilitation care in BRS low vision clinics, outpatient blind rehabilitation clinics, and intensive inpatient blind rehabilitation centers.

Severely disabled blind Veterans receive life-long case management by Visual Impairment Service Team (VIST) Coordinators. They may also receive in-home and community services by Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists (BROS) in many areas.

The treatment setting depends upon the severity of vision loss, and the intensity of Veterans' and Servicemembers' needs.

### VIST COORDINATOR

The VIST Coordinator is often the first BRS contact. The VIST Coordinator is a case manager who:

- Coordinates services and assurance of VA benefits for severely disabled Veterans and Servicemembers who are visually impaired.
- Teams with military medical treatment facility case managers to identify and to provide seamless transition for Servicemembers with visual impairment.



- Provides case management for visually impaired Servicemembers at VHA Polytrauma Centers.
- Refers Veterans and Servicemembers for vision and blind rehabilitation according to their needs and goals.
- Educates and informs crucial partners and assures their inclusion.

Veterans and Servicemembers can receive follow-up care in the BRS program best suited for their needs.



(Photo courtesy of Bruce Bowens)

**BLIND REHABILITATION OUTPATIENT SPECIALIST (BROS)**

BROS are multi-skilled blindness professionals who provide a wide array of rehabilitation services for Veterans and Servicemembers.

Services include functional assessments, visual skills training, daily living training, and orientation and mobility training. BROS work in the most appropriate setting, including home, VA site, college or university, work site, stores,

long-term care or assisted living environments.

**INPATIENT BLIND REHABILITATION**

The inpatient blind rehabilitation centers provide comprehensive, individualized inpatient rehabilitation for severely disabled Veterans and Servicemembers at VA Medical Centers.

An interdisciplinary team of blind rehabilitation specialists works with nurses, psychologists, social workers, recreation therapists and eye care specialists. The rehabilitation programs help patients to achieve independence, adjust to blindness, and develop a healthy and realistic outlook.

**VISUAL IMPAIRMENT SERVICES OUTPATIENT REHABILITATION PROGRAM (VISOR)**

The VISOR programs are multi-day outpatient, blind rehabilitation services for local Veterans and Servicemembers, and for those who require outpatient lodging to attend. VISOR staff provides blindness and low vision rehabilitation for patients who are able to manage medications and are independent in basic activities of daily living, or who have a caregiver with them.

**LOW VISION CLINICS**

Low vision clinic staff includes optometrists, ophthalmologists, and Blind Rehabilitation

Specialists. They provide care for patients with vision loss who have remaining vision that is useful for daily tasks. Patients receive low vision clinical examinations and assistive technology to enhance remaining vision. Rehabilitation professionals provide functional assessments of visual ability, visual motor and visual perceptual training, and orientation and mobility training to support rehabilitation goals. At times, non-visual techniques may be safer.

*In 2014:*

*VIST Coordinator rosters included 49,605 Veterans and Servicemembers who receive life-long case management to assure they receive all entitled benefits and care.*

*Inpatient blind rehabilitation centers provided care for 2,172 severely disabled blind Veterans and Servicemembers.*

*Outpatient blind and low vision rehabilitation clinics provided care for 16,939 Veterans and Servicemembers.*

*BROS provided rehabilitation to 9,315 patients in their homes, communities, and medical facilities.*

