

BLIND REHABILITATION SERVICE FACT SHEET

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides blind and vision rehabilitation programs that target Veterans and Servicemembers who are visually impaired. While the challenge to do this has greatly increased, VA has aggressively expanded innovative service delivery models to better meet these needs. VA has committed to provide world-class rehabilitation training by enhancing services, improving access to care, and increasing patient satisfaction for Veterans and Servicemembers with visual impairment.

MISSION

The mission of Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS) programs is to restore independence and quality of life for Veterans and Servicemembers with visual impairment, to assist them in adjustment and re-integration into home and community life, and to educate their crucial partners.

- Visual dysfunction – any impairment in ability to perform everyday tasks related to the visual pathway (current definition assures inclusion of patients with traumatic brain injury).

manual skills training for crafts, hobbies and household repair. BRS services include training with access technology, adjustment counseling, patient and family education and peer support. BRS partners with eye care for clinical low vision examinations and prescriptive optical devices to enhance remaining vision.



VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

Definitions :

- Legally blind (LB) – 20/200 or worse in better seeing eye, or visual field of 20 degrees or less.
- Low vision – 20/70 to 20/200 in the better seeing eye, may also include central or peripheral field loss.

VHA BLIND REHABILITATION

BRS programs provide intensive case management for severely disabled blind Veterans. Services include:

- Life-long rehabilitation care and access to services,
- Partnering with teams of medical and rehabilitation specialists for Veterans and Servicemembers with Polytrauma, and
- Clinical research that advances evidence-based practices.

BRS programs provide; comprehensive rehabilitation including orientation and mobility, recommendation and support for guide dogs, activities of daily living and communication training, visual skills training, and

ACCESS TECHNOLOGY

BRS programs provide needed access technology. Access technology could include vision-enhancing devices such as specialized optical and electronic devices that enlarge images for viewing and blindness aids including speech-output computers and peripherals, global positioning devices, money readers, head-mounted technology that enhances all skills, etc.

SERVICE ELIGIBILITY

Eligible Veterans and Servicemembers who have one or more functional disabilities from vision loss and need rehabilitation care may receive services. Visually impaired Servicemembers, Veterans with service-connected visual impairment, and Veterans rated 50 percent or greater for any combination of disabilities receive priority care.



Visual disability among Veterans and Servicemembers may range from an inability to see well for reading, to difficulty managing changing lighting conditions and walking safely to total blindness.

The most common causes of vision loss among older Veterans are age-related conditions such as glaucoma, diabetes and macular degeneration. Young patients may have vision loss due to wounds, disease and trauma, especially traumatic brain injury.

BRS PROGRAMS

BRS national program office at VA national headquarters in Washington, D.C. provides support and oversight of services across VA, including:

- 166 Visual Impairment Service Team Coordinators
- (VIST)
 - 92 Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists
- (BROS)
 - 13 Inpatient Blind Rehabilitation Centers
 - 9 Outpatient Blind Rehabilitation clinics
- 44 Outpatient Low Vision Clinics

There are approximately 750 Blind Rehabilitation Specialists and Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists providing care in BRS programs.

BRS also partners with community agencies and vendors to provide computer-assisted training in-home and in-community.



PATIENT GOALS

Frequently cited rehabilitation goals for visually impaired patients include relearning to read and write using access technology; managing finances, medications and healthcare management.

Activities of daily living goals include household skills (cleaning, making repairs, preparing meals), shopping, leisure activities, sports and social activities; family care (children or aging parents); grooming and clothing care; organizing, moving safely in their environments, taking public transportation, and managing time.

Some Veterans with visual impairment who retain vision are able to drive again using adaptive devices.

Blind Rehabilitation Specialists and Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist (BROS) are multidisciplinary master’s or baccalaureate professionals trained and credentialed to provide care for people who are visually impaired. These professionals can include:

- Certified Low Vision Therapists, Orientation and Mobility Specialists, Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists, Certified Computer Access Technology Specialists, Occupational Therapists, and others qualified.
- Visual Impairment Service Team Coordinators may include blind rehabilitation professionals, as well as social workers, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and other counseling and case management professionals.

