



FACT SHEET

Terry E. Branstad
Governor

Kim Reynolds
Lt. Governor

Richard Sorey
Director

OVERVIEW

In Iowa, about 69,000 people are visually impaired, and of this number, about 10,000 are blind.

The Iowa Department for the Blind, nationally recognized as a leading provider of services to the blind and visually impaired, believes that Iowans who are blind or visually impaired can lead active and fulfilling lives at home, at work and in their communities.

- **Iowa Department for the Blind Background**

- The Iowa Department for the Blind (formerly the Iowa Commission for the Blind) has provided services to Iowans since 1925.
- A Commission consisting of three members appointed by the Governor and confirmed in the Senate.
- The Department is governed by the Commission for the Blind which appoints the Director for the Department.
- The Department employs 87 Iowans, including 21 who are blind or visually impaired.
- The Department's main office is in Des Moines, with field staff state-wide.

- **Services and programs offered by the Iowa Department for the Blind**

- **Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

- The Vocational Rehabilitation Program helps people to prepare for, obtain and retain competitive employment.
 - Successful job placements in Iowa after training is nearly 82%, ranking the Department second nationally among agencies that serve blind or visually impaired individuals.
 - As of May, 2009, the average hourly wage obtained after completing the Department's Vocational Rehabilitation Program was \$13.81.
 - 99% of individuals participating in the Department's training programs reported a more positive attitude about blindness.
 - The Department currently rehabilitates over 100 blind or visually impaired individuals per year.
 - Forty individuals who are rehabilitated into competitive employment will return revenue to the state and federal treasuries in the form of taxes and Social Security payments, the equivalent of the entire operating budget of the Iowa Department for the Blind.
 - The impact of one 25-year-old blind or visually impaired individual:
 - If a person remains unemployed:
 - Draws \$1,004 per month Social Security (average payment in January 2009)
 - Total: \$480,000 at age 65

524 Fourth Street
Des Moines, IA 50309-2364
Tel: 515-281-1333
800-362-2587
Fax: 515-281-1263
TTY: 515-281-1355

www.IDBonline.org

- If rehabilitated and working:
 - Assume earnings are \$9.50 per hour, \$380 per week or \$19,760 per year
 - Lifetime federal and state taxes paid will be approximately \$150,000
- Total: Over \$630,000 positive difference to the taxpayers of Iowa
- **Business Enterprises Program**
 - The Business Enterprises Program provides opportunities for legally blind clients of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to manage their own businesses. These blind entrepreneurs manage a wide variety of food-service operations that can be found at federal, state, county, municipal and private locations throughout Iowa.
 - The Department provides initial and ongoing food service and management training, as well as beginning inventory and purchase of equipment.
 - The average income of Business Enterprises Program business owners is \$41,000 per year.
- **Independent Living Rehabilitation Services**
 - The Independent Living Program provides a range of services designed to help blind or visually impaired Iowans to live independently in their own homes and remain active in their families and communities. Teachers travel throughout the state to provide services in a person's home or in small group settings.
 - Training in adaptive techniques for cooking, shopping, communication, travel and leisure activities
 - Peer counseling, including support groups
 - Basic adaptive devices
 - Information and referral services
 - In-service training for other service providers
- **Orientation Center**
 - The Orientation Center is a residential blindness training program. It provides in-depth, individualized blindness training to adults so that they can return to their home communities, imbued with confidence and equipped to live independently. Training provided includes:
 - Braille reading and writing
 - White cane travel
 - Keyboarding
 - Non-visual operation of the computer
 - Industrial arts
 - Home and personal management
 - Classes discussing issues related to blindness
- **Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped**
 - The Library provides books, magazines and other informational materials in Braille, audio, large print and electronic formats to Iowa residents who are unable to use standard print materials because of a disability. Playback equipment for use with audio materials is also available on loan.
 - The library's collection is home to 300,000 items – all available by mail, free of charge.
 - In 2008, the Department's library circulated nearly 250,000 items to more than 7000 individuals and 377 organizations throughout Iowa.
 - Textbooks and other educational materials for K-12 and college students are available through the library's Instructional Materials Center (IMC).
 - The IMC also produces vocational materials in accessible formats for jobseekers and employed Iowans upon request.
 - Visitors to the Library's Career Resource Center have access to a public computer station equipped with screen enlargement and screen reading software, Microsoft Office and Internet access.
 - Volunteers contribute in a variety of ways including Braille transcription, audio narration, data

entry, proofreading and machine repair. Volunteers have transcribed 17,000 books into Braille, recorded nearly 15,000 audio books, and fulfilled thousands of requests for everything from Braille restaurant menus to audio recordings of employee handbooks.

– **Aids and Devices Store**

- The Aids and Devices Store sells items useful to persons who are blind or visually impaired. Items can be purchased at cost or furnished as part of some individual rehabilitation plans.
 - Some of the items available through the store include:
 - White canes
 - Talking watches and clocks
 - Braille-writing equipment
 - Magnifiers
 - Measuring devices ◦ Braille and large-print playing cards and games
 - Cooking and sewing aids
 - Computer tutorials that teach computer users how to access popular Windows applications with screen-reading software

– **Public Education and In-Service Training**

- The Department is eager to educate the public about blindness and visual impairment through presentations to schools, churches, civic organizations and other groups. In addition, in-service training is provided to care centers, community rehabilitation programs and other community service providers.

• **Employment of Iowans who are Blind or Visually Impaired**

- People who are blind or visually impaired work in a broad variety of jobs and professions – ranging from law and education to information technology, food service, manufacturing and customer service.
- The benefits of hiring a person who is blind or visually impaired typically include quality work, high productivity, longevity on the job, low absenteeism and more.

• **Blindness and Visual Impairment Statistics**

– **Iowa**

- As a percent of Iowa's and the United States' total populations (respectively), the following statistics are worth noting (2004 statistics, for persons over 40 years of age, from *Vision Problems in the U.S., 2008*):
 - Iowans who are blind or visually impaired are estimated at 3.13%, compared to 2.80% nationally.
 - Iowans who are totally blind are estimated at .88%, compared to .80% nationally.
 - Iowans with age-related macular degeneration are estimated at 2.03%, compared to 1.60% nationally.
 - Iowans with cataracts are estimated at 19.32%, compared to 17.17% nationally.
 - Iowans with diabetic retinopathy are estimated at 3.21%, compared to 3.45% nationally.
 - Iowans with definite primary open angle glaucoma are estimated at 1.69%, compared to 1.76% nationally.

– **National Statistics**

- 3.6 million people with vision loss have a bachelor's degree or higher (2006 NHIS).
- Nationally, Public Vocational Rehabilitation Programs can be an integral part of economic growth and development.
 - For every dollar spent on vocational rehabilitation, \$5.00 is returned to the government.
 - For every dollar spent on vocational rehabilitation, \$14.00 to \$18.00 is returned to the economy.
- National studies show that individuals with disabilities have equal or higher job performance ratings, have higher retention rates, and have lower absentee rates than employees without disabilities (Unger, "Employer's Attitudes," 2002).

- The safety record of employees with disabilities compared to employees without disabilities is identical (DuPont Survey, 1990).
- 92% of the American public view companies that hire people with disabilities more favorably than those that do not (A National Survey of Consumer Attitudes Towards Companies that Hire People with Disabilities, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 2006).
- 87% of the public agree that they would prefer to give their business to companies that hire people with disabilities (A National Survey of Consumer Attitudes Towards Companies that Hire People with Disabilities, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 2006).
- According to the National Federation of the Blind, as many as 10 million Americans are blind or visually impaired.
- 80 million people suffer from potentially blinding eye diseases (The University of Washington Department of Ophthalmology).
- Each year, 6.4 million new cases of eye disease occur (The University of Washington Department of Ophthalmology).
- By the year 2020, the number of blind persons in the U.S. is projected to increase by 70% to 1.6 million, with a similar rise projected for low vision (Citations and Abstracts from April 2004 Archives of Ophthalmology).
- Almost all blindness in the United States is the result of common eye diseases; less than 4% result from injuries (The University of Washington Department of Ophthalmology).
- Incidence of eye disease increases with age. Low vision or blindness affects approximately 1 in 28 Americans over 40 years of age. The most prevalent eye diseases affecting older Americans are: age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma.
 - According to the National Federation of the Blind, there are 5.5 million seniors in the United States who are either blind or visually impaired, and studies show that over the next 30 years, aging baby boomers will double the current number of blind or visually impaired Americans.
 - Age-related macular degeneration is likely the most common cause of legal blindness and visual impairment in older Americans.
 - Cataracts account for a significant amount of vision impairment in the U.S. and affects over 22 million Americans age 40 and older.
 - This is particularly true in older people who may have difficulty accessing appropriate eye care due to cost, availability or other barriers (*Vision Problems in the U.S.*, 2008).