



Terry E. Branstad
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FACT SHEET

OVERVIEW

In Iowa, about 54,000 people are visually impaired (Vision Problems in the U.S. 2012, Prevent Blindness America), and of this number, just over 8,100 are registered with the Iowa Department for the 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 74 Iowans, including 15 who are blind or visually impaired (06-30-15).
 - 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.
 - In FY 2013, successful job placements in Iowa after training is 77%, ranking the Department third nationally among agencies that serve blind or visually impaired individuals.
 - As of September, 2014, the average hourly wage obtained after completing the Department's Vocational Rehabilitation Program was \$16.81.
 - In FY 2013, the Department rehabilitated 99 blind or visually impaired individuals.
 - **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.

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- **Independent Living Rehabilitation Services**
 - The Independent Living Program provides a range of services designed to help blind or visually impaired lowans to live independently in their own homes and remain active in their families and communities. For individuals who are eligible for services, 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 or the general public
- **Orientation Center**
 - The Orientation Center is a comprehensive, residential blindness training program. It provides opportunities to learn nonvisual skills, build self-confidence, and develop a positive attitude about blindness so that graduates can live independently and pursue employment.
 - GED preparation
 - College preparation
 - Classes in Braille
 - Computer classes
 - Cane travel
 - Industrial arts
 - Home, personal management
 - Blindness discussion class
- **Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped**
 - The Library provides books, magazines, and other materials in Braille, audio, and large print formats to lowans who cannot use standard print. Materials circulate by mail, free of charge, or can be downloaded at the patron’s convenience.
 - Books and magazines in audio, Braille, or large print
 - Playback equipment for audio materials
 - Descriptive videos
 - Transcription of print materials to Braille and audio formats for instructional, employment, and leisure use
 - Independent access to the Library’s collection through the On-Line Public Access Catalog
 - Download on Demand service for audio materials
 - The library’s collection is home to 300,000 items – all available by mail, free of charge.
 - In 2014, the Department’s library circulated nearly 297,271 items to more than 6,000 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 lowans 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 & Devices Store**
 - The Aids & 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
- **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 (For persons over 40 years of age, from 2012 Fifth Edition of *Vision Problems in the U.S.*):
 - Iowans who are blind or visually impaired are estimated at 3.71%, compared to 2.94% nationally.
 - Iowans who are totally blind are estimated at 1.20%, compared to .90% nationally.
 - Iowans with age-related macular degeneration are estimated at 2.70%, compared to 2.09% nationally.
 - Iowans with cataracts are estimated at 19.19%, compared to 17.11% nationally.
 - Iowans with diabetic retinopathy are estimated at 5.13%, compared to 5.39% nationally.
 - Iowans with definite primary open angle glaucoma are estimated at 1.85%, compared to 1.91% nationally.

