

2021 Annual Report



**New Mexico Commission for the Blind
and
New Mexico Commission for the Blind
State Rehabilitation Council**

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State Rehabilitation Council

October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021

New Mexicans with Vision Loss 2020 Statistic

Under 18	-	6,358
18 to 64	-	36,886
65 and older	-	32,864
Male	-	36,319
Female	-	39,789
Total	=	76,108

Definition and Scope:

The term vision loss refers to individuals who reported they have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses or contact lenses, as well as those who are blind or unable to see at all.

Data Source:

Updated September 2020

Source: American Community Survey single-year data, U.S. Census Bureau. The following are estimates which were calculated based on weighted survey samples.

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Introduction

The Commission for the Blind provides vocational rehabilitation and independent living services to persons who are blind or visually impaired, enabling them to participate and contribute in society. Persons who are blind or visually impaired lead normal lives, have families, raise children, participate in community activities, and work in a wide range of jobs. They are social workers, lawyers, teachers, engineers, machinists, scientists, supervisors, and business owners. The real challenge is to educate people who are blind or visually impaired about their own potential, and to educate society about the capabilities of persons who are blind or visually impaired.

The Commission believes persons who are blind or visually impaired are normal, and blindness, in and of itself, is not a barrier to leading a normal and productive life. The Commission provides services that enable persons who are blind or visually impaired to enhance their abilities and assume roles in the community as working, taxpaying, and contributing citizens.

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) of the Commission for the Blind was created pursuant to the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which is now Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The SRC works in close partnership with the Commission by helping to formulate vocational rehabilitation policies and procedures. One of the major activities in this partnership is assistance in the preparation of the Commission's portion of the Combined State Plan, including the Goals and Priorities which are developed jointly between the SRC and the Commission. The Commission and the SRC worked actively together during the year to modify the Commission's portion of the Combined State Plan, which took effect on July 1, 2020.



Mission Statement

Our mission is to enable persons who are blind to achieve vocational, economic, and social equality by providing career preparation, training in the skills of blindness, and above all, promoting and conveying the belief that blindness is not a barrier to successful employment or to living an independent and meaningful life.



“Whether you are the parent of a child diagnosed with a visual impairment, a person who is blind due to a genetic condition, a person who is a senior with age-related macular degeneration, or whether your blindness might have been the result of any one of a number of other circumstances, the New Mexico Commission for the Blind is here to let you know that blindness is not a barrier to leading a full, meaningful, and productive life.”

Greg Trapp, J.D.,
Executive Director

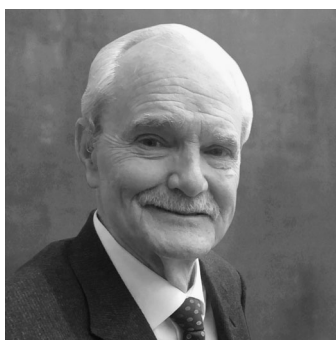
Commissioners



Arthur A. Schreiber
Commission Chairman
Albuquerque



Shirley Lansing
Commissioner
Albuquerque



Dr. Robert Reidy
Commissioner
Santa Fe



NEW MEXICO COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND

2200 Yale Blvd., S.E.
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106
(505) 841-8844
FAX: (505) 841 8850



December 15, 2021

The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham
Governor of the State of New Mexico
State Capitol, Fourth Floor
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87503

Dear Governor Lujan Grisham,

The Commission for the Blind hereby submits its Annual Report pursuant to 28-7-17(H) NMSA 1978, and pursuant to 34 CFR 361.17(h)(5). The Annual Report is for the Federal Fiscal Year ending September 30, 2021.

The Commission has continued to serve blind and visually impaired residents of the state of New Mexico during the Coronavirus pandemic. This was initially accomplished through the provision of remote services, but the Commission also provided in-person services when appropriate. Starting July 26, the Commission began providing increased direct services through a mix of in-person and telework.

The Commission continues to implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requirement that at least 15 percent of Federal vocational rehabilitation funds be spent on Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for students aged 14 to 21. While the pandemic prevented the Commission from spending all of the 15 percent Pre-ETS reserve, the Commission was able to provide all of the required and authorized Pre-ETS services. Despite the fact that the Pre-ETS requirement reduces the funds available for adults, the Commission was still able to serve all eligible individuals.

The Commission is dedicated to the goal of helping blind persons become self-supporting and participating members of society. The following report details the ways in which the Commission accomplished this goal.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Arthur A. Schreiber".

Arthur A. Schreiber
Commission Chairman

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Greg D. Trapp".

Greg D. Trapp, J.D.
Executive Director

State Rehabilitation Council Members Commission for the Blind

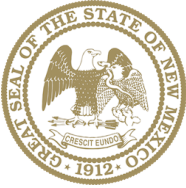


Peggy Jo Hayes, Chair
Alamogordo

Jim Babb, Vice-Chair
Albuquerque

Kaitlin Ellis, Secretary
Albuquerque

- Jim Babb, Current or Former Recipient of VR Services - Albuquerque**
- Bernadine Chavez, Client Assistance Program - Albuquerque**
- Katherine Chavez, Business, Industry, and Labor - Santa Fe**
- Deborah Clark, State Education Agency - Santa Fe**
- Craig Cooper, Business, Industry, and Labor - Alamogordo**
- Kaitlin Ellis, Current or Former Recipient of VR Services - Albuquerque**
- Peggy Jo Hayes, Blind Advocacy Group - Alamogordo**
- Mario Hooee, Business, Industry, and Labor - Zuni Pueblo**
- Coby Livingstone, Statewide Independent Living Council - Albuquerque**
- Paul Luttrell, Community Rehabilitation Program - Albuquerque**
- Lila Martinez, Parent Training and Information Center - Las Cruces**
- Yolanda Montoya-Cordova, State Workforce Board - Albuquerque**
- Daphne Mitchell, Qualified VR Counselor - Albuquerque**
- Paula Seanz, American Indian VR Services - Navajo Nation**
- Greg Trapp, Director of Designated State Unit - Albuquerque**



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December 15, 2021

The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham
Governor of the State of New Mexico
State Capitol, Fourth Floor
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87503

Dear Governor Lujan Grisham,

Pursuant to 34 CFR 361.17(h)(5), the State Rehabilitation Council of the Commission for the Blind hereby submits its Annual Report for the federal fiscal year ending September 30, 2021. The Council worked closely with the Commission, including on the Federal requirement that 15 percent of vocational rehabilitation funds be reserved and spent on provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). The Pre-ETS requirement has resulted in many agencies needing to establish waiting lists for services, but the Commission has been able to avoid a waiting list and successfully serve all eligible individuals.

As with all segments of society, the Coronavirus pandemic has affected Commission services. The pandemic has reduced the Commission's number of vocational rehabilitation closures, and independent living services during much of the year has been provided remotely.

The pandemic also impacted the ability of the Commission to spend the 15 percent Pre-ETS reserve. The Pre-ETS impact is primarily due to the closure of schools and the lack of work-based learning experiences. This is a national issue, and the U.S. Department of Education recommended that the Pre-ETS 15 percent reserve be waived as a result of the pandemic.

The following Annual Report details the accomplishments of the Commission for the Blind and State Rehabilitation Council.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peggy Jo Hayes".

Peggy Jo Hayes
State Rehabilitation
Council

Accomplishments

Federal Fiscal Year 2021



James L. Salas, Deputy Director
*Vocational Rehabilitation and
Independent Living / Older Blind*

Services Delivered

Vocational Rehabilitation Program	348
Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP)	30
Orientation Center	16
Business Enterprise Program	15
Technology for Children	16
Independent Living / Older Blind Program	374
Emergency Eye Care Surgeries	11

New Mexico Commission for the Blind Programs and Services



Vocational Rehabilitation

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program serves persons who are legally blind and individuals with qualifying visual impairments. The VR Program helps persons who are blind or visually impaired to become employed in ways that are consistent with each individual's "strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, informed choice, and economic self-sufficiency." Despite the pandemic, the Commission was able to serve 348 VR consumers during the federal fiscal year that ended on September 30, 2021. This was a reduction of 16 persons from the prior year. The Commission was also able to successfully place 23 consumers in employment, an increase of 10 individuals from the prior year. An additional 18 persons were in "employment status" at the end of the year and awaiting case closure. For the state fiscal year that ended on June 30, 2021, 21 persons were placed in employment.

The 23 consumers that the Commission placed in employment in the federal fiscal year earned an average starting wage of \$26.14 per hour, and the 21 consumers placed during the state fiscal year earned an average starting wage of \$28.23 per hour.

Despite pressures and restrictions caused by the pandemic, and despite the federal requirement to spend 15 percent of the vocational rehabilitation grant on Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), the Commission for the Blind served all eligible vocational rehabilitation consumers during the year. Unlike a majority of vocational rehabilitation agencies, the Commission does not anticipate having to implement an Order of Selection (waiting list) for services. At a virtual meeting of the Commission for the Blind State Rehabilitation Council held on September 14, 2021, the Commission determined that it had the ability to provide the full range of vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals.

On September 3, 2021, the Commission signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Health, Developmental Disabilities



Daphne Mitchell, Program Manager
Vocational Rehabilitation

The purpose of the MOA is to establish a cooperative agreement with the state agency with primary responsibility for providing services and supports for individuals with intellectual disabilities and individuals with developmental disabilities.

The MOA will help the Commission better serve persons who are eligible for home and community-based waiver programs.

Consumer Satisfaction Survey

The State Rehabilitation Council met in a special meeting on March 26, 2021, and approved a survey to assess the satisfaction of vocational rehabilitation consumers. The survey was conducted by Research and Polling Inc., and the results were reported to the Council by Brian Sanderoff on June 22, 2021. The survey showed that overall 81 percent of persons served by the Commission were satisfied, which Mr. Sanderoff said was "very favorable."

Transition Services

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires the Commission to spend at least 15 percent of the vocational rehabilitation grant on the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). The Pre-ETS services include five required activities, four coordination activities, and nine authorized activities. However, WIOA imposes some significant restrictions on how the 15 percent reserve can be spent. For instance, the reserve can only be spent on “students” age 14 to 21, and the reserve cannot be used to pay for administrative costs. There are also restrictions on the purchase of computers, and the reserve cannot be used to pay for tuition and most transportation. Finally, the reserve cannot be used for the authorized Pre-ETS activities unless all of the required Pre-ETS activities are provided. At a virtual meeting of the Commission for the Blind State Rehabilitation Council held on September 14, 2021, the Commission forecasted that it had sufficient funds to provide all of the required Pre-ETS activities during Federal Fiscal Year 2021, enabling the Commission to provide both the required and authorized Pre-ETS activities.

On January 28, 2020, the Commission signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED). The MOA establishes a formal interagency agreement as required by 34 CFR 361.22(e). The agreement provides for methods of coordination between the agency and PED to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from the receipt of educational services, including pre-employment transition services, in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services from the agency. These methods of coordination also facilitate the development and approval of an Individualized Plan for Employment as early as possible.

The Commission has a Governmental Services Agreement with the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and has an intergovernmental agreement with the New Mexico Central Region Educational Cooperative.

The purpose of both agreements is to expand the Pre-ETS services that are provided to students in New Mexico.

The Commission’s Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Program Manager, Transition Coordinator, Skills Center Coordinator, and Skills Center teachers all regularly attended Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings during the year. The Commission seeks to regularly attend Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings by age 14, and in some cases even earlier. The goal is to provide transition planning and services that facilitate the development and completion of their IEPs, and to thereby enhance the quantity and quality of employment outcomes that will ultimately be achieved by consumers aged 14 to 21. The pandemic resulted in all IEP meetings being attended virtually, though the Commission had routinely attended IEP meetings through virtual methods.



Kuo Lan-Hsin Nancy Schneider,
Statewide Transition Coordinator
Vocational Rehabilitation

Students in Transition to Employment Program - (STEP)

The Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP) provides an intensive transition experience that gives Commission consumers with a variety of skills instruction and a paid work-based learning experience. Young persons who are blind or visually impaired have traditionally been limited in their ability to engage in such work experiences, depriving them of the important benefits of student employment. Due to public health and safety concerns, the pandemic restricted the number of work-based learning experiences that were available to STEP students. The pandemic also prevented operation of the residential STEP program at the Orientation Center in Alamogordo.

During Federal Fiscal Year 2021, STEP served 30 blind students ranging in age from 14 to 21. Twenty-five students engaged in work-based learning, and 16 students received training provided by the Skills Center. The Skills Center training included both in-person and remote instruction. The pandemic has kept many students from receiving Orientation and Mobility training, and the Skills Center made it a priority to provide Orientation and Mobility training to these students.

For a blind student to become successfully employed, he or she must acquire a positive attitude about blindness and learn essential blindness skills. The skills that were taught included Braille, computer technology, orientation and mobility, personal management, and cooking. The students also participated in seminars and presentations from successful blind adult role models.



Orientation Center

The Orientation Center is a residential program that serves the Commission's vocational rehabilitation consumers. The Center helps blind or visually impaired persons acquire the skills needed to become successfully employed. The Center is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), and is certified by the National Blindness Professionals Certification Board (NBPCB). The Commission's Orientation Center is the only blindness training center in the nation that has both CARF accreditation and NBPCB certification. The Center provided intensive training to 16 consumers in the skills of blindness during the year. The Center is located in Alamogordo and serves consumers from throughout the state. The adult training typically lasts six to nine months, during which time students usually reside in the Center's dormitory. The Orientation Center began providing training virtually in March of 2020, and returned to in-person training in June of 2021. Because of the pandemic, the Orientation Center is only providing in-person services to adults.

To expand capacity and make training more realistic, the Center is in the process of building an apartment facility on land donated to the Commission. The State Rehabilitation Council has actively participated in the planning for these apartments, making specific recommendations regarding their configuration and design. The apartments were entirely funded by the state legislature, and construction is scheduled to be completed in August of 2022. The construction had originally been scheduled to be complete in November of 2021, but construction was delayed by the pandemic.

Consumers attending the Center receive intensive training in cane travel, Braille, assistive technology, home management, personal management, physical education, and industrial arts. Most of these students are newly blinded, and require intensive training to successfully participate in the Commission's Vocational Rehabilitation Program and to ultimately become employed. The Center has a computer lab, a classroom with two complete kitchens, a fully-equipped industrial arts shop, and a conference room where seminars are held. The Center also has an exercise room that is equipped with professional gym equipment that helps students improve their fitness level and increase their confidence.

The training is built around the use of "learning shades" to eliminate the student's desire to rely on inadequate or failing vision. By learning effective non-visual techniques, students gain self-confidence and learn how to function as successful blind persons.



Lucy Mallahan, Deputy Director
Orientation Center

Assistive Technology

The use of assistive technology is a crucial factor in the successful employment of persons who are blind. However, studies consistently show that persons with disabilities are less likely to own a computer and access the Internet. This gap is called the “digital divide.” The Commission’s Assistive Technology Program seeks to close this gap. One of the challenges to doing this is that a blind or visually impaired person must learn the application, as well as the assistive technology that allows access to the application. The digital divide became even more of an issue during the pandemic because of the need for persons who are blind or visually impaired to access training and services remotely, as well as the need to use the computer or smart phone to shop or have medical appointments. Making matters worse is that some meeting platforms are not accessible, and those that are accessible can be challenging to learn.

The Commission’s technology specialists provided consumers with assistive technology such as screen readers, Braille displays, screen magnification programs, video magnifiers, and computerized Braille note takers. The Assistive Technology Program delivered 56 computers; conducted 203 technology evaluations; provided 14 Braille devices; provided 26 video magnifiers; installed 193 assistive technology applications; provided 758 training sessions to 199 persons; and provided 1,960 technical support sessions. Most of the technology was delivered using contact-free methods, and most of the technical support was provided virtually.



**Eric Gonzales,
Assistive Technology Specialist**

Business Enterprise Program

The Business Enterprise Program provides employment opportunities for legally blind individuals who wish to operate food service facilities. Authorized by the federal Randolph Sheppard Act, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) performs an essential service by providing cafeteria and food vending services throughout the state, including at Kirtland Air Force Base, Sandia National Laboratories, and Los Alamos National Laboratories. The program also provides food vending services at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Artesia, as well as thirteen locations of the United States Postal Services in Albuquerque. In addition, the program operates vending for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration at White Sands, as well as the National Reconnaissance Office and the US Customs and Border Protection in southern New Mexico. The program also operates vending services in Albuquerque for the Social Security Administration, the Indian Health Services, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Department of Agriculture, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Internal Revenue Service, the Transportation Security Administration, the Department of Homeland Security, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The Business Enterprise Program provides government workers and the public with quality food service that is conveniently located within government buildings and installations. This last year, 15 blind persons participated in the Business Enterprise Program, and vendor earnings were \$2,544,794, with \$159,984 paid in gross receipt taxes.



Vickie Robertson, BEP Vendor
Sandia National Labs C-Store

Commission Supports National Defense

A BEP vendor operates the Thunderbird Inn and Dining Facility at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque. The operator of this facility has distinguished himself in competitions for national and international Air Force dining operations, including winning the “Gold Plate,” and also winning the even more prestigious “John L. Hennessy” award.



Thunderbird Inn and Dining Facility
Kirtland Air Force Base, Albuquerque



Federal Law Enforcement Training Center
Artesia (Photo by Kodi Owens, FLETC)

A BEP vendor also serves the food and dining needs at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Artesia, which is capable of serving meals to 1,000 students. The Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) provides training to over 100 different federal law enforcement agencies, as well as local, state, and tribal law enforcement agencies.

Newsline for the Blind

Newsline is a telephone-based system that allows persons who are blind or visually impaired to access a variety of newspapers and publications. The offerings include the Albuquerque Journal, the New Mexico Magazine, the Gallup Independent, and the Santa Fe New Mexican. Newsline also includes the newsletter of the National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico and the State Library Talking Book Newsletter. Blind or visually impaired readers can use Newsline to access important information such as grocery ads, drug store ads, and legal notices. The service is now in its 30th year of operation.

Newsline has created a special category dedicated to news stories related to the Coronavirus, and Newsline has distributed critical information on testing, public health orders, and breaking medical information.



Krista Mireles, Coordinator
Newsline

Newsline normally functions with volunteer readers recording stories from inside specially built recording booths located in the Newsline office in Albuquerque. Because of the pandemic, volunteer readers started reading from their homes on March 17, 2020. The volunteer readers are often retired, so they are at higher risk from severe illness due to COVID-19.

The Newsline reader uses the buttons of a telephone to select the desired newspaper, and to move within and between publications. The reading is done by approximately 75 trained volunteers. The service is available statewide free of charge, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Commission also sponsors NFB-NEWSLINE, an audio information service developed by the National Federation of the Blind that provides access to over 400 publications. NFB-NEWSLINE users can access state newspapers such as the Farmington Daily Times and Las Cruces Sun News, national newspapers such as USA Today, international newspapers such as The Jerusalem Post, and magazines such as Smithsonian Magazine. NFB-NEWSLINE also provides access to job listings, television schedules, and weather alerts.

Skills Center

The Skills Center helps meet the needs of the Commission's vocational rehabilitation and independent living consumers. Located in the Albuquerque office, the Skills Center has employees who provide services throughout the state. The Skills Center has classrooms designed for specific subject areas such as Braille, technology, cooking, and personal management. It also has a large lecture room that is ideal for group meetings and seminars. In 2021, the Skills Center provided instruction to 16 students participating in the Students in Transition to Employment Program. In addition, Skills Center employees have also provided in-person Orientation and Mobility training to students who needed the training due to special health or safety concerns.

The Commission's Technology for Children Program is operated by the Skills Center. The Technology for Children Program provides children with needed assistive technology, helps the Commission build and strengthen relationships with local school districts, identifies eligible students, and provides information about transition and other vocational rehabilitation services. The Technology for Children Program annually receives \$80,000 in funding from the New Mexico Department of Health. The Technology for Children Program provided assistive technology to 16 blind and visually impaired children who were under 18 and could not obtain the technology from other sources. The technology provided ranged from digital book players to more advanced items such as video magnifiers and computerized Braille note takers.

The Technology for Children Program continued to provide services during the pandemic, with most deliveries of technology taking place through contact-free methods. The technology provided has helped blind students participate in the remote instruction being offered by their local school districts, making the Technology for Children Program an especially critical service during the pandemic.

One of the most significant challenges the Commission faces is the need to support Braille proficiency for students who are blind or visually impaired. Meeting this critical need is a priority of the Skills Center. As a direct result of the Skills Center's efforts to increase Braille proficiency, there are now 29 persons with NCUEB certification residing in New Mexico. This gives New Mexico the highest number of NCUEB certified teachers in the nation.



Kelly Burma, Coordinator
Skills Center

Independent Living and Older Blind Program

The Independent Living (IL) Program serves a rapidly growing population of persons who are blind or visually impaired. In an effort to enhance services, the Commission hired an IL Program Manager in January of 2020. The Program Manager brings additional expertise and adds additional capacity to the Independent Living Program.

The Independent Living Program is facing particular challenges because of the pandemic. The large majority of persons served are seniors, and this population is at higher risk of severe illness due to Covid-19. As a result, the Commission suspended visits to nursing homes and assisted living facilities even before these facilities were closed to outside visitors. Starting on March 17, 2020, the Commission began providing IL consumers with remote services and contact-free technology deliveries, with in-person services being provided only when necessary to protect the health or safety of a consumer. Starting in July of 2021, the Commission began providing additional in-person services.

The purpose of the IL Program is to enable persons who are blind or visually impaired to live independently in their own homes and communities. The Independent Living Program consists of “Part B” funds which can be used to serve persons of all ages, and the “Older Individuals who are Blind” funds, which is restricted to persons who are 55 and older. The IL Program provided intensive training to 374 consumers during Federal Fiscal Year 2021.

Independent living services are provided to blind and visually impaired consumers throughout the state, with most persons being served in their own homes. The instruction includes training in Braille, how to travel using a white cane, how to use public transportation, and instruction in personal and home management skills.

The training also includes provision of basic assistive technology devices such as white canes, hand-held video magnifiers, optical magnification devices, Braille writing equipment, and Braille or talking watches. During Federal Fiscal Year 2021, the Commission provided 52 hand-held video magnifiers to visually impaired consumers, enabling those individuals to read items such as prescription labels, bills, and bank statements. The independent living teachers serve the entire state, often traveling over long distances to reach consumers in rural areas. The teachers engage in frequent outreach to senior centers, and work with many seniors who are living in assisted living facilities and nursing homes. The teachers also serve younger consumers who are newly blinded and participating in the Commission’s Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

Most of the independent living consumers served by the Commission were seniors who had recently lost vision due to conditions such as age-related macular degeneration or diabetic retinopathy. Approximately 3.5 percent of the population over 65 is legally blind, and the aging of the population is resulting in a significant increase of visually impaired seniors. This senior population is also becoming more technologically advanced, and the Independent Living Program is seeing more consumers who have needs related to computers and smart phones.



Juan Haro,
Program Manager
*Independent Living and
Older Blind*

Emergency Eye Care

The Emergency Medical Eye Care Program seeks to prevent blindness and restore vision through medical intervention. The program provided eleven emergency eye surgeries to New Mexicans who lack the resources to cover the cost of medical eye emergencies. Covered procedures include emergency eye care problems that, if not expeditiously attended to, could result in irreversible vision loss or structural damage to the eye. The majority of procedures are laser treatments, retinal re-attachments, and treatments for acute eye trauma. The program enables patients to receive a continuity of care with an ophthalmologist of his or her own choosing. This program is the only means by which many persons can avoid permanent blindness. The goal is to return those served to their previous activities and prevent the need for expensive medical and rehabilitative services.

State Rehabilitation Council

Goals and Priorities

The following goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the Commission for the Blind and the State Rehabilitation Council. The Commission for the Blind conducted a total of five virtual public meetings to gather input on modifications to the Combined State Plan. The Council held virtual meetings on August 10, 2021, and on September 14, 2021, during which the Council developed and approved the Goals and Priorities. The Council added new Goals and Priorities related to the provision of services designed to compensate for reduced services caused by the pandemic, and added goals and priorities designed to encourage greater access to telework.

a. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by proactively working to recruit, hire, and retain qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors, including in a way that is inclusive and culturally competent, thereby providing for greater continuity and consistency in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

b. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing appropriate vocational rehabilitation services to the growing population of older workers, many of whom will be unable or unwilling to retrain for work in a field different from their current occupations, thereby enabling these older workers to become or remain successfully employed.

c. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing appropriate vocational rehabilitation services that support the maintaining of a healthy lifestyle that is conducive to becoming and remaining successfully employed, thereby enabling a greater portion of agency consumers to become and remain successfully employed.

d. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing vocational rehabilitation training and counseling that is designed to enhance and improve the soft skills of consumers, which are becoming an increasing barrier to agency consumers becoming and remaining successfully employed.

e. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by partnering and working with community colleges and One-Stop centers to more effectively utilize services available through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner-Peyser programs.

f. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by working cooperatively with the New Mexico Department of Health so as to develop opportunities for competitive and integrated employment for persons who are blind or visually impaired, which will be accomplished by working in partnership with the Medical Assistance Division, the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and the Behavioral Health Services Division.

g. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by using the Orientation Center to provide employment preparation training for adults and transition students, including through the addition of an apartment training facility to be constructed adjacent to the Center. The proposed apartment facility will increase the capacity of the Orientation Center, will enable the Orientation Center to provide more realistic training, will eliminate the need to rent costly and less appropriate private apartments, and will reduce the number of instances in which costly out-of-state training will be necessary to meet the needs of consumers.

h. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by using the Orientation Center to provide training for adults and transition students to compensate for any deficiencies in skills that may have been caused by their inability to receive training or services during the pandemic, and to prepare them for new telework opportunities by providing them with enhanced technology training.

i. Increase the number of consumers served through enhanced Outreach Activities; including media outreach, use of paid advertising, through increased collaboration with ophthalmologists and optometrists, and through the use of the Technology for Children program to conduct outreach to school districts.

j. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes of transition consumers by providing enhanced Pre-Employment Transition Services, including assistive technology where appropriate as a part of an Individualized Plan for Employment, by providing assistive technology through the Technology for Children Program, by conducting increased outreach activities, by conducting educational activities to meet the specific needs of transition students, by increasing proficient use of Braille and Braille math, and by providing services designed to compensate for any deficiencies in these areas that may have been caused by their inability to receive training or services during the pandemic.

k. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers by providing services in a way that genuinely honors the "informed choice" provisions of the Rehabilitation Act, enabling Commission consumers to have the opportunity to obtain employment at higher levels of compensation.

l. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers by providing a quality and expanding Newsline system that gives consumers access to employment listings, business news, and other important information, including through both local Newsline and through NFB-NEWSLINE.

m. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by innovatively using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers and potential vocational rehabilitation consumers, including using it for provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services.

n. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers and potential vocational rehabilitation consumers, including using it to provide them with training to compensate for any deficiencies in skills that may have been caused by their inability to receive training or services during the pandemic, and to prepare them for new telework opportunities by providing them with enhanced technology training.

o. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the provision of independent living training to vocational rehabilitation consumers, including through the proposed apartment training facility at the Orientation Center.

p. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the provision of increased telework employment opportunities, including opportunities in rural portions of the state.

q. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers who are Deaf-Blind through collaboration and partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, with the Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf, and with the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, including through the delivery of assistive technology to consumers who are Deaf-Blind.

r. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) by shortening the time required for vendors to complete the required training, including by using Randolph-Sheppard Act training offered by the Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Expenditures on Consumer Services

Federal Fiscal Year 2021



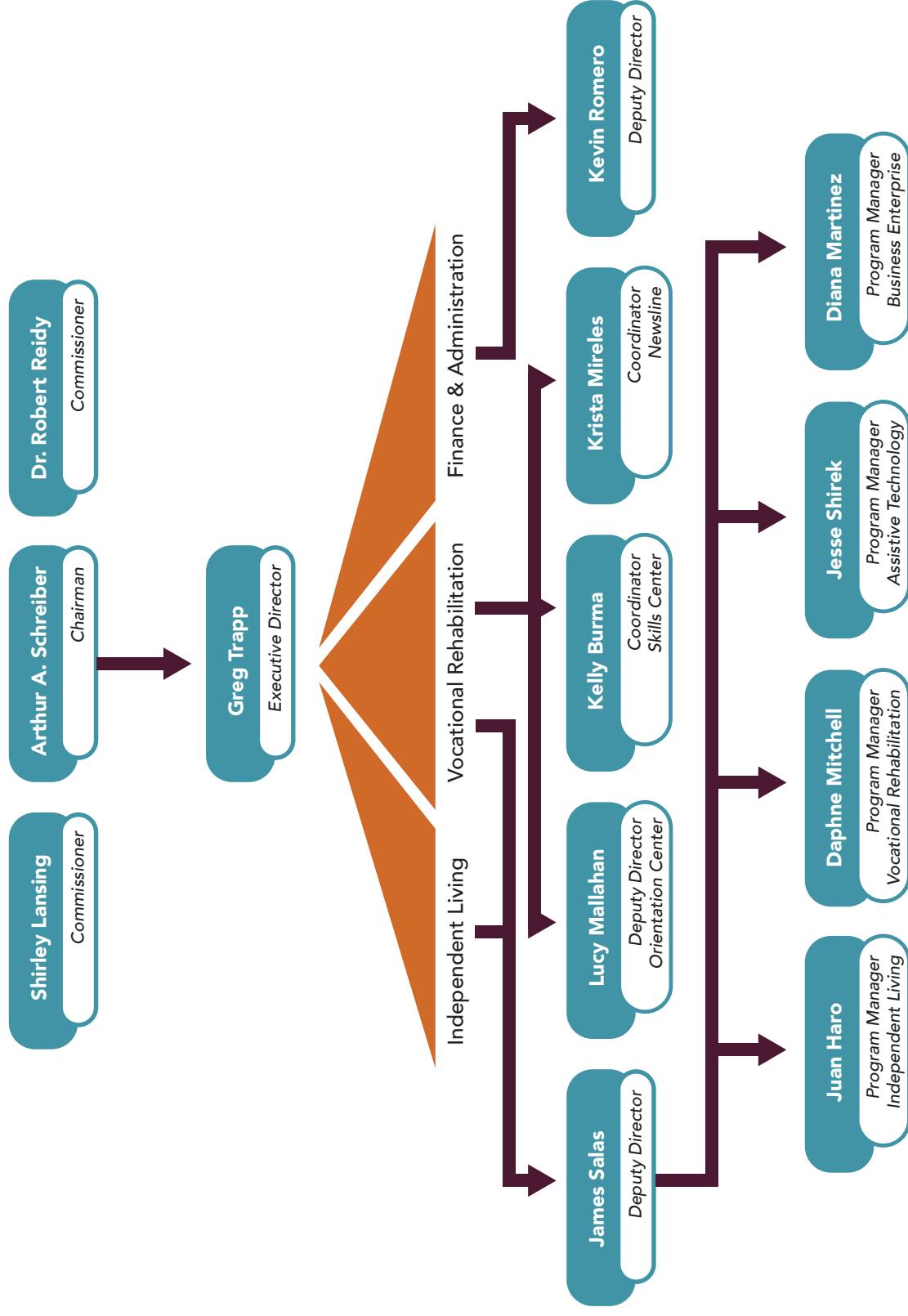
Kevin Romero, Deputy Director
Finance and Administration

Vocational Rehabilitation Consumers.....	\$1,045,696
Independent Living Consumers.....	\$56,467

Note: The foregoing amounts reflect the cost of items and services that are purchased for vocational rehabilitation and independent living consumers. They also reflect the relatively small amount of federal independent living funds that the commission receives. They also do not reflect the costs associated with attendance at the Orientation Center; training provided by Independent Living Teachers; training provided by Technology Specialists; counseling and guidance provided by Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors; technology provided by the Technology for Children Program; participation in the Business Enterprise Program; or use of Newline for the Blind. Finally, the independent living amount does not include the 52 video magnifiers provided during the year, which are the most expensive assistive technology item provided by the IL program. The video magnifiers are purchased in bulk to reduce costs.

Organizational Chart Commission for the Blind

Commissioners



Statewide Office Locations

Administrative Office

2905 Rodeo Park Drive
East Building 4, Suite 100
Santa Fe, NM 87505
505-476-4479
In state toll free 888-513-7968

Farmington Office

1800 E. 30th Street
Suite B
Farmington, NM 87402
505-327-3031
In state toll free 888-513-7964

Alamogordo Orientation Center

408 North White Sands Blvd.
Alamogordo, NM 88310
575-437-0401
In state toll free 888-513-7967

Las Cruces Office

277 E. Amador
Suite 101
Las Cruces, NM 88001
575-524-6450
In state toll free 888-513-7960

Albuquerque Office

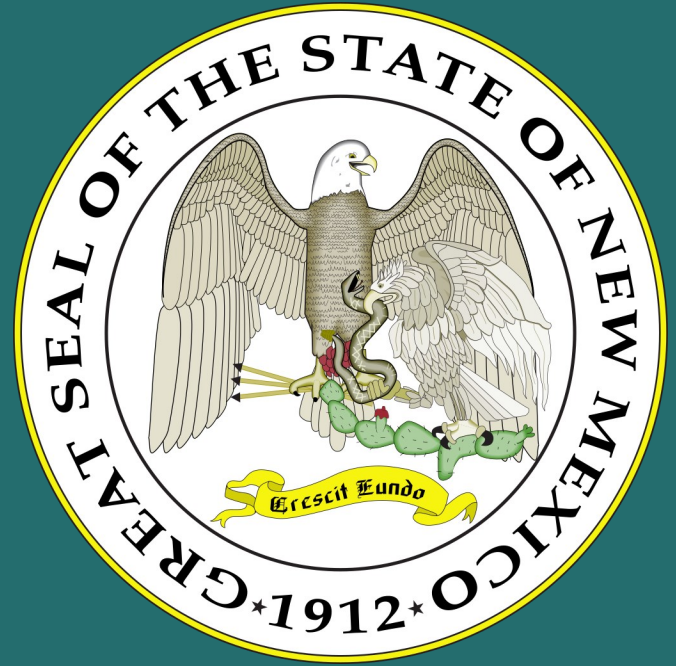
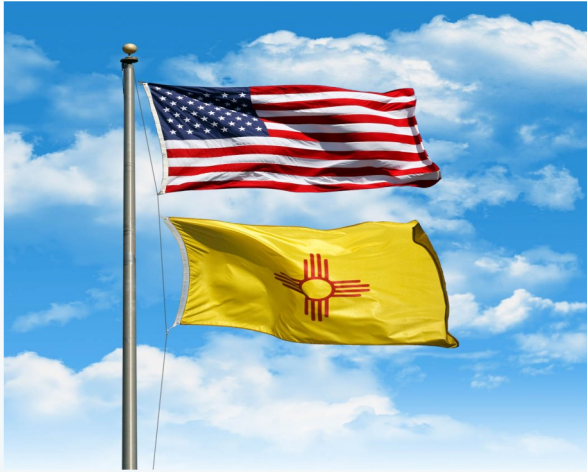
2200 Yale Blvd. SE
Albuquerque, NM 87106
505-841-8844
In state toll free 888-513-7958

Roswell Office

400 North Pennsylvania Suite 900
Roswell, NM 88201
575-624-6140
In state toll free 888-513-7961



The logo is oval with NM Commission for the Blind around the rim. The center is in shades of blue with a red Zia symbol in the sky above mountain peaks and a yucca with green leaves, a tan stalk and gold flower in the foreground.



Copies of this annual report are available in Braille, large print and electronic format by contacting:

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New Mexico Commission for the Blind

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