

Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program Fact Sheet

- Among the programs administered by the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) that transferred to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) on September 1, 2016, as prescribed by Senate Bill (SB) 208, signed into law on June 19, 2015, is the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind (ILS-OIB) program. This program is funded through a \$2.1-million federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).
- Independent living services for individuals of all ages who are visually impaired had been delivered directly by DARS staff. These services included a separate federal funding stream that was allocated specifically for services to individuals ages 55 and older. SB 200 transferred the administration of the State Independent Living Services program, which provides a broad array of independent living services to individuals of all ages, to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) on September 1, 2016.
- In Fiscal Year 2015, there were nearly 3,000 individuals statewide with visual impairments ages 55 and older who were provided independent living services through the DARS Division for Blind Services.
- In late 2015, TWC's three-member Commission approved a plan to enter into an interagency contract with HHSC to operate ILS-OIB-funded services in conjunction with other independent living services. This interagency contract would have allowed the \$2.1 million in IL-OIB federal grant funds to be pooled with other independent living funds at HHSC to have greater impact for individuals needing services. TWC notified RSA about this planned service delivery in December 2015 and January 2016.
- There was no further word from RSA until late July 2016, when it notified TWC that it would not approve the plan to contract these services through HHSC. A TWC appeal of that decision was denied.
- TWC considered all service-delivery options. To ensure that as much funding as possible will be spent in direct services to the eligible individuals and to minimize overhead costs associated with oversight and monitoring, TWC will directly administer the program—through qualified staff members hired by TWC—to coordinate the program and deliver the services.
- ILS-OIB provides the following:
 - Information and referral services
 - Independent living skills training
 - Low-vision evaluations and low-vision devices
 - Orientation and mobility training
 - Diabetes education
 - Deaf-blind evaluations and equipment
 - Counseling on adjustment to blindness

- Other services as necessary
- HHSC will administer independent living services to this same population through contracts with Centers for Independent Living across the state. TWC will work closely with these centers to ensure a smooth referral process and non-duplication of services.
- To ensure that services were available on September 1, 2016, TWC identified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselors and VR teachers—from among the VR staff transitioning to TWC on September 1, 2016—who will work with blind individuals to provide case management and in-home independent living services where needed around the state. This will be a temporary arrangement while dedicated ILS-OIB caseworkers are being hired.
- Fourteen permanent staff members will be hired to provide ILS-OIB services and coordinate the program as soon as possible.
- A public meeting was held on September 22, 2016, at 3:00 p.m. in the TWC Main Building, Room 244, 101 E. 15th Street, in Austin to present the plan for the new program and gather feedback from stakeholders and the public.