

"Focus"



Please Share This Information

- Individuals
- Parents/Guardians/
Caregivers
- Day/Residential
Providers
- Employers
- DDS Service
Coordinator
- MCB Case Manager
- School, DDS and/or
MCB Transition
Coordinator

Orientation & Mobility / Vision Loss Services in the Northeast Region

Serving individuals with intellectual disability who have vision impairment, legal blindness, deaf blindness, or a question of a vision loss, the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) and Department of Developmental Services (DDS), is here to help.

- MCB provides direct and consultative Orientation and Mobility/Low Vision services, training, and resource information to individuals registered as legally blind with the Commission. Services are provided by Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS) whose work is focused on each adult's unique vision loss needs.
- DDS can evaluate individuals, who are not legally blind, in an effort to reduce health and /or safety concerns related to vision that impact their life and level of independence.

Areas Served: Central Middlesex, Lowell, Merrimack Valley,
Metro North and North Shore

"Focus"

A resource of the MCB/DDS Partnership Project

focusonvisionandvisionloss.org

508.384.5539

It all starts with a referral...

What Is the Cost?

There is no cost to adults receiving O&M/Low Vision Services for individuals who are registered as Legally Blind with MCB. There is no cost to DDS eligible individuals who are not legally blind, to receive a REACH evaluation to address health or safety concerns that may or may not be vision related.



How to Refer

- For individuals who are not registered as Legally Blind with MCB, REACH Clinic Referrals must be initiated by the DDS eligible individual's Service Coordinator. Please direct questions regarding REACH Referrals to Karen.McDonald@mass.gov
- For individuals who are registered as Legally Blind with MCB, contact the DDS Service Coordinator or DDS Transition Coordinator to request completion of the MCB NE Region O&M Services Referral Form. This form is available on the focusonvisionandvisionloss.org website.
- Unsure if an individual is registered as Legally Blind? Contact Lisa.DiBonaventura@mass.gov

When to Refer

Referral can be made at any time, and especially when an adult experiences a change in vision, mobility, and/or environment.

Referrals for transition to adult services should be made during the year of, and preferably at least 6 months prior to, the student's planned transition. Transition to DDS adult services typically occurs between the ages of 18 and 22.

What to Expect

Soon after the initial referral is received by MCB or the DDS REACH Team, a visit will be set up to meet with the individual at home or at work/day services and/or school for students who are transitioning to adult services, to determine appropriate supports.

What to Include with the Referral

Sharing of information truly helps. Along with the referral form, please provide recent reports from:

- Specialists: COMS, TVI, PT, OT, AT Provider, SLP, Behaviorist
- Eye Care Providers: Ophthalmologist (MD) and/or Optometrist (OD)

Services for Individuals Not Registered As Legally Blind

The REACH Team, including Area Office's registered nurses, and the Region's Nurse Practitioner, meet monthly with the REACH clinicians to review referrals and completed evaluations. The expertise of this Regional Team is applied to all health and safety concerns identified in new referrals. The needs of each individual are discussed and arrangements are made to meet the person in the setting(s) that pose challenge to the individual's comfort and safety. Clinicians gather information from direct evaluation of the individual as well as through conversations with family members, staff and others who support the individual. The individual and supporters may be instructed in carryover techniques to best support the individual and reduce health and safety concerns.

How can a REACH Referral through an individual's DDS Service Coordinator help?

The resulting evaluation will include specific strategies and recommendations from the occupational and/or physical therapists conducting the evaluation. REACH evaluations are written in an easy to read and implement fashion, often come with pictures or product ideas and may have references for resources located near the individual's home or service setting.

Specialized Services for Individuals Registered As Legally Blind

Adults are on the move and so are we! Throughout an adult's life there may be new or progressive vision loss concerns, changes in employment, day program, residence, and/or new staff to work with. Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS) through MCB can assist an adult who is legally blind during all of these life changes and transitions. We work with individuals where they spend time and meet them at home, in the community, at work, at day program, and during leisure activities.

How can Specialized O&M/Low Vision Services help?

Vision Loss Training & Support

Working with adults, families, caregivers, support staff and clinical teams, we provide:

- Sensitivity training, including use of Human Guide and all O&M techniques.
- Consultation re: impact on daily life, work, and leisure.
- Information on resources, materials, and events.

Strategies

Living with vision loss presents unique challenges. We can help:

- Safety, organization, and skill resources for independence and inclusion.
- Recommendations for maximizing use of functional vision and increasing participation.
- Strategies for daily living, work tasks, leisure activities, and risk management.
- Consultation with providers during DDS Supportive Technology Assessments.

Accessibility

Accessibility increases safety, independence, and visual function. We provide:

- Recommendations for use of color, contrast, lighting, furniture placement, handrails, and more.
- Identification of indoor/outdoor hazards and solutions.



Free Resources

Opportunities await! We offer registration assistance:

- APH Federal Quota Account
- Talking Book and Braille Library
- U.S. Currency Reader Program
- iCan Connect

Mobility & Safety

Confident, safe mobility promotes independence, and prevents falls/injury. We offer: Instruction and plans for use of Human and/or

- Voice Guide, Trailing, Protective Techniques, Long or Adaptive Cane.
- Transportation and safety assessments.
- Orientation skills training at home, neighborhood, work, and day program.

Eye Care

Promoting eye care is important. We provide:

- Advocacy for high quality eye exams.
- Information at eye exams regarding use of vision in everyday situations.
- Assistance with eyeglass tolerance.
- Sunglass evaluation.

All recommendations will be provided to individuals and teams through written evaluations and trainings from the assigned Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS).

Specialized Services for Individuals Registered As Legally Blind

APH Federal Quota

Eligible adults can receive free products from the MCB American Printing House for the Blind Federal Quota Account (APH).

Information regarding eligibility, registration, and a link to the APH Products Catalog can be found on the "Focus" website:

focusonvisionandvisionloss.org

Please review and ask your MCB Case Manager or DDS Service Coordinator to complete and send the Pre-Registration form.

Students previously registered on the DESE APH account during school years, must also complete a new registration form for the MCB/APH Quota Account.

Prior account eligibility on the DESE APH Account is not needed for a young adult to be found eligible for the MCB APH

DDS Supportive Technology for Vision Loss / Combined Vision- Hearing Loss

An evaluation produces recommendations for devices and products to meet unique needs and goals. More information can be found on the "Focus" website.

Collaboration and Oversight Details

Oversight for COMS services is provided by MCB in collaboration with the Statewide Director for Vision and Vision Loss Services at DDS.

Getting to Know COMS

Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS) are University trained and certified through the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals (ACVREP). COMS provide specialized services that include mobility skill instruction (human guide, protective techniques, voice guide, trailing, long cane, adapted cane), orientation instruction to new routes and locations, functional vision and environmental evaluations. COMS also offer blindness/vision impairment sensitivity training to staff and caregivers.

Additional Resources

focusonvisionandvisionloss.org

- "Focus" Talks
- Eye Care Provider Resources
- Let's Walk Together Video
- Train the Trainer: Human Guide and Vision Loss Sensitivity
- Caregiver Support Group

For More Information

Please visit our "Focus" website:
focusonvisionandvisionloss.org

Lisa DiBonaventura, MA, COMS,
Statewide Director Vision & Vision Loss Services
Department of Developmental Services
Lisa.DiBonaventura@mass.gov
Office: 508.384.5539