

# Older Blind Services Policy Manual

Version 1.1

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## OBS – Chapter 1

### MISSION STATEMENT

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The Older Blind Services (OBS) Program's mission is to improve the quality of life for Missourians who are blind or visually impaired, are 55 years of age or older, and reside in the State of Missouri. Through the OBS Program, training is provided to individuals and groups in alternative techniques, skills, and the use of adaptive equipment in order to assist them in reaching their independent living goals.

We believe that the provision of such services can lead to self-sufficiency, empower older clients to participate in home and community life, help them maintain, regain, or increase independence, and enable the clients and family members to create an independent environment.

We recognize that by providing outreach and education services, we will promote public awareness of the program and accommodations that can be made to improve the lives of older persons who are blind or visually impaired.

### CHAPTER 1 – GENERAL POLICIES

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#### DEFINITIONS

**Adaptive equipment** – an aid that can be used to compensate or accommodate for decreased capacity or loss of an ability to function independently as a result of a visual disability.

**Client** – A client is an individual with a visual disability who has been determined eligible for the OBS Program.

**Designated State Unit** – Rehabilitation Services for the Blind (RSB) is the designated state unit that is referred to in Title VII Chapter 2 of the Rehabilitation Act as amended 1998.

**Legal Blindness** – Any individual who has a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with corrective lenses, or central acuity of more than 20/200 if there is a field defect such that the peripheral diameter of central visual field subtends an angular distance no greater than 20 degrees.

**Electronic Visual Aids** – Electronic visual aids (EVAs) are devices which magnify print and enlarge it electronically upon a screen so a person with some residual vision can access print materials visually.

**Low Vision Aids** – Low vision aids are optical devices that are stronger than regular eyeglasses which are used in conjunction with the prescribed corrective lenses. Low vision aids can help clients maximize their remaining vision by magnifying, filtering light, or increasing the usable field of vision.

**Older Individual Who is Blind or Visually Impaired** – individual age 55 or older whose significant visual impairment makes skills of independent living difficult to accomplish.

**Sole State Agency** – The Family Support Division is the sole state agency referred to in 13 CSR 40-91.020.

**State Unit Director** – The Deputy Director, FSD, RSB, is the state unit director referred to in Title VII Chapter 2 of the Rehabilitation Act as amended.

**Visual Disability** – means:

1. That an individual is legally blind or;
2. That an individual with a progressive eye disease has a central visual acuity of 20/70 or worse in the better eye with best correction, or has near vision that is decreased to the extent that the individual cannot read print that is smaller than Jaeger nine (J9) with best correction.

## NON-DISCRIMINATION

The Missouri Family Support Division (FSD), Rehabilitation Services for the Blind (RSB), will assure that eligibility requirements are applied without regard to sex, race, age, disability, creed, color, or national origin of the individual applying for services. No upper age limit may be set which would result in a finding of ineligibility; however, persons receiving independent living services for older individuals who are blind or visually impaired must be at least 55 years of age. RSB does provide to its clients information in their native language and in the alternative format of their choice. This may include but is not limited to, Braille, recorded materials, disk, tactile, auditory and visual readout which are necessary to implement and provide RSB rehabilitation programs.

## TIMELY PROVISION OF SERVICES

RSB staff shall process referrals and applications in a timely manner. The referral status is limited to 45 days. The client should be contacted by phone within 15 days of referral. An application should be obtained within 30 days of the initial contact.

Eligibility should be determined soon as possible, but not later than 60 days after the date of application. If this is not possible, a letter explaining the reason for delaying eligibility determination should be sent to the client prior to the 60 day limit and documented in the case record. For the purposes of determining timely case movement from applicant status to eligibility, RSB will consider the date the application is received as the start date of eligibility determination.

The service plan must be created within 90 days of determining the individual eligible for services.

## COST-EFFECTIVE SERVICE PROVISION

Services shall be provided in the most cost-effective manner in order to prepare the client for independent living that is consistent with his/her capacities and abilities.

## CASE FILE DOCUMENTATION

RSB staff shall maintain a case record for each client or applicant that will contain pertinent documentation of the following factors:

**Note:** Click on the following link for guidance on [Good Practices in Case Narration](#).

1. An application requesting OBS services.
2. Documentation that supports the rehabilitation teacher's determination of eligibility or ineligibility, i.e. an eye report from an Optometrist or Ophthalmologist, Snellen Chart test given by Rehabilitation Teacher, or self-disclosure.
3. A plan that will include the services to be provided agreed upon by the rehabilitation teacher and the client.
4. Written documentation from a health care professional indicating the need for the purchase of equipment that is used for management of a secondary disability that have an impact on vision or visual disabilities, such as adapted blood pressure monitors, food and weight

scales. These items will be purchased only if there are no comparable benefits available. If the secondary disability has no relationship to the client's visual disability, RSB will provide resources or information regarding the purchase of products specific to their disability.

5. Documentation at case closure indicating whether the client's goals and objectives have been achieved
6. Documentation and justification of all services and equipment provided
7. On-going written narrative entries of case progress

## EXCEPTIONS

The Deputy Director of RSB or his/her designee shall have the sole responsibility for any exceptions to this policy manual.

## OBS – Chapter 2

### CONFIDENTIALITY

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RSB/OBS, through its policies and procedures, will comply with Federal provisions of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act as it relates to the protection, use, and release of health information.

## OBS – Chapter 3

### ELIGIBILITY

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A. An individual's eligibility for the OBS Program is based on the following criteria:

1. The individual meets the definition of visual disability as outlined in Chapter One;
2. The individual must be 55 years of age or older, and reside in the state of Missouri;
3. The individual must require substantial agency services in order to achieve their independent living goals.

The case record must document the eligibility criteria.

1. To the degree possible, RSB staff will use existing information to determine eligibility. A diagnostic eye examination may be required for an applicant specifically for the purpose of determining eligibility for OBS services only if available information is not complete, relevant, or current.

The following proofs of eye condition will be accepted for determination of eligibility:

1. A written or verbal report from a health care professional or their representative that indicates that the client's eye condition meets the OBS Program's visual disability requirements;
2. The use of a near or distance vision chart (consistent with standards reflected in the Snellen chart) used by the rehabilitation teacher;
3. A statement in the narrative section of the case record that, due to age or severity of the disability, the examiner is unable to obtain visual acuities for inclusion with the required eye reports, and that the staff member considers the individual eligible for services based on the functional limitations caused by the visual condition, if the functional limitations are consistent with the best corrected acuities/fields expressed in the definition of visual disability in Chapter 1.

B. The individual is age 55 or older.

C. The individual resides in the State of Missouri and is available in the state to receive services from RSB.

D. If a case has been closed as rehabilitated within the past 12 (twelve) months, the district supervisor must approve reopening the case.

NOTE: The circumstances listed below may be used as a guide when considering the reopening of an OBS case.

1. Continued vision loss, after case closure, that significantly impacts functioning, i.e. the need for a stronger magnifier, talking watch versus a low vision watch, Braille versus large print.
2. Client's need for substantial services due to change of attitude regarding adjustment to blindness or vision loss, i.e. Orientation and Mobility training.
3. A change in a household that impacts the client's functioning, i.e. death of spouse, change of living situation, now living alone.

4. A case may be reopened only if the service need is visually related. Cases may not be reopened if the services requested are specific to the management of a secondary disability.

An email must be copied to the OBS Program Manager when the district supervisor has approved the reopening of an OBS case. The email shall provide the name of the client, case number, name and load number of the rehabilitation teacher, the justification for reopening the case and district supervisor's approval. A copy of the email must also be placed in the client's case file at the district level.

E. There must be a written notification of eligibility provided to the client acknowledging that the basic eligibility requirements have been met. This notification must be signed and dated by the appropriate RSB staff member.

## OBS – Chapter 4

### ECONOMIC NEED

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RSB does not currently apply economic need criteria to the provision of OBS Services.

## OBS – Chapter 5

# OBS SERVICES

## QUALIFICATION OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

RSB will use only professional service providers who meet applicable state licensure or certification requirements.

## SERVICES

RSB, in accordance with its State Plan and the Title VII Chapter 2 OBS Grant, will provide the following services, as appropriate, for the needs of each eligible client. Evaluation by RSB staff will determine eligibility for, and the nature and scope of services needed.

1. Orientation and Mobility Services are provided by RSB staff to enhance the client's ability to travel independently within their home and/or their community. When appropriate a cane may be provided. Mobility services may be purchased in rare instances when a district office is without an Orientation and Mobility Specialist for an extended period of time and when services needed cannot be met by a Rehabilitation Teacher.
2. Communication Skills Training includes instructing clients in the use of adaptive time pieces, reading and writing Braille, using writing guides, e-mail, screen enlargement, adaptive telephones, tape recorders, computer access technology, etc.
3. Daily Living Skills may include evaluation and training in activities of daily living or personal adjustment. Adaptive aids may also be purchased in conjunction with such services. Adaptive equipment may be purchased when it can be used to compensate or accommodate for decreased capacity or loss of an ability to function independently as a result of a visual disability; such as, timers, watches, double spatulas, clocks, etc.
4. Low Vision Training/Services may include low vision evaluations provided in order to assess the client's need for low vision aids. Such an evaluation may be purchased only when a Rehabilitation Teacher is unable to determine the type of low vision aid needed by the client.
5. Advocacy Services includes training the client in self-advocacy skills.
6. Management of Secondary Disabilities may include diabetic evaluation and education, diabetic aids and equipment, and assistive listening devices for clients who have a hearing loss.
7. Counseling and Guidance Services are provided by the rehabilitation teacher and may include personal adjustment counseling, peer support, and mentoring. In addition, family counseling may be provided when it is deemed necessary for improvement of the client's ability to live independently.
8. Interpreter Services for the deaf and deaf-blind may be purchased by RSB in instances when no other means of communication with the client is available. RSB may also assist in coordinating volunteers to provide sighted guide, interpreter and reader services for clients.
9. Referral for Vocational Rehabilitation Services means that the RT may make a referral to the VR program when appropriate.
10. Referral to Other Agencies by RSB staff may be provided to assist the client in securing services from other agencies to enhance the ability of the client to live and function independently.

11. Support Group Services may be provided to encourage the involvement of clients in interacting with others who have similar disabilities for the purpose of enhancing social skills and promoting emotional support.
12. Community Integration Services may be provided to assist in locating/accessing community activities and services. Staff may encourage the client to engage in activities which improve self-image and self-worth through volunteering.
13. Recreational Items may include the provision of playing cards and other large print or Braille games, etc.
14. Transportation Services may include travel for the purpose of participating in OBS services, such as participation in training sessions, support groups, obtaining a low vision evaluation and visits to the appropriate district office to meet with an RSB staff member.
15. Visual Restoration Services may include surgery and treatment for eye conditions and the purchase of regular prescription eye glasses for which no other resource exists or such resource has been exhausted.

## SERVICE AND EXPENDITURE LIMITS

### Visual Restoration and Management of Secondary Disabilities:

1. Both visual restoration and management of secondary disabilities are limited to \$3000. Exceptions to the \$3000 limit must be approved by the OBS Program Manager.
2. Adaptive aids and equipment that are purchased with OBS funds must be those that deal primarily with a visual disability and secondary disabilities that have an impact on the client's visual functioning. OBS should purchase the necessary aids and equipment to allow non-visual use of household devices, not the household devices themselves.
3. Purchase of equipment such as diabetic aids, blood pressure monitor, food scales, weight scales and hearing aids may be considered only upon the written/verbal recommendation of a health care professional. Documentation of the statement from the health care professional must be placed in the case record

### Cost of Electronic Visual Aids:

Maximum expenditure for a single electronic visual aid is \$600.

### Cost of Low Vision Aids:

Maximum expenditure for a single low vision aid is \$600.

**An Ownership Agreement must be obtained when the cost of a piece of equipment is \$500 or over.**

### Purchase of Hearing Aids:

A rehabilitation teacher may purchase hearing aids when no similar benefit exists. Client must sign the hearing aid invoice before submittal to State Office for payment. If a client has a hearing impairment and no similar benefits are available, less expensive devices such as the A200 or the Pocket Talker may be considered first.

#### Purchase of Duplicate Equipment:

1. Duplicate devices shall not be purchased at any time unless the level of the disability has changed, such as further vision loss.
2. If a client's case is reopened, an adaptive aid that had been purchased in an available previous case shall not be purchased in the newly opened case unless the staff member can clearly document the need as a result of a change in the client's disability.

#### Purchase of Transportation Services:

Transportation services will be provided by the most economical source of transportation that meets the client's needs. Transportation costs will be limited to the cost of mileage traveled by private automobile according to travel regulations for employees of the State of Missouri. Bus, train and cab fare are reimbursed at actual charges.

#### Purchase of Recreational Items:

Purchase of recreational items will be limited to no more than two games per client and the need for this service must be documented in the case record.

### Case Length Limit

OBS cases cannot be open for more than 18 months without documented approval of the district supervisor.

## OBS – Chapter 6

### COMPARABLE SERVICES AND BENEFITS

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The Older Blind Services Program requires clients to utilize comparable services and benefits for all applicable services. A comparable service or benefit is any resource which may provide equipment and/or services similar to those provided by the OBS program. Some examples which must be considered include: Medicare, Medicaid, veteran's benefits, health insurance, Missouri Telecommunication Access Program (TAP), Independent Living Centers, or any other comparable service or benefits available to the client. OBS staff are encouraged to use similar benefits whenever possible. Consideration and use of comparable services or benefits is documented in the narrative and contract for services (authorization).

**FOR MEDICARE RECIPIENTS**, OBS may pay the deductible and co-insurance amount (including any difference between Medicare reimbursement and allowable cost) up to the fee schedule after all other resources have been exhausted.

#### Consideration and Utilization for Diagnostic Exams

OBS staff are not required to consider comparable services and benefits for diagnostic exams intended for use in eligibility determination.

## OBS – Chapter 7

### FINANCIAL POLICIES

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#### **State and Departmental Purchasing Procedures**

RSB staff must follow applicable departmental, divisional, and agency purchasing policies and procedures when purchasing goods or services for OBS clients.

#### **Purchased Services**

RSB staff must authorize services and approve rate of payment in accordance with the regulations and policies established by the OBS Program.

#### **Authorization for Services**

RSB staff will ensure that an authorization is written before any service is purchased or provided.

## OBS – Chapter 8

### CASE CLOSURE

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#### **Conditions for Case Closure**

RSB shall close a client's case at any time in the rehabilitation process when it has been determined that the case meets one of the following criteria:

1. Rehabilitated – The client has successfully reached the goals in their teaching plan.
2. Relocated to another state.
3. Withdrew/stated no further interest in program
4. Died
5. All other reasons

## OBS – Chapter 9

### APPLICANT AND CLIENT RIGHT TO APPEAL

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#### **Review Process:**

1. RSB staff inform the applicant or client that they must make a written request for a review to the OBS Program Manager.
2. The supervisory review is held within 30 days of receipt of the request, during normal working hours and at the district office where the applicant's or client's case record is located.
3. RSB staff members who were involved in case activities that led to the disputed decision are available for testimony.
4. During the review process, the applicant, client or, if appropriate, the individual's parent, guardian or other representative, or agency may present additional evidence, information and witnesses and may be represented by counsel or other appropriate advocate and may examine all witnesses and other relevant sources of information and evidence.
5. The OBS Program Manager informs all persons present of the purpose of the supervisory review and of the confidentiality of all matters that will be discussed.
6. Before the review begins, the applicant or client must present written authorization to discuss confidential information in the presence of counsel and witnesses.
7. Within 10 working days following the supervisory review, the OBS Program Manager notifies the applicant or client by certified mail of the decision and sends a copy of the decision to the Deputy Director, RSB.
8. If a client disagrees with the decision of the OBS Program Manager, they may request, in writing, a review by the Deputy Director of RSB. Such requests must be made within twenty (20) days of the mailing of the Program Manager's decision. The Deputy Director shall notify the applicant or client of the date, time and location of the review, along with their right to submit additional evidence and information.
9. Necessary travel and subsistence costs incurred for an applicant or client to attend a supervisory review may be paid from OBS case service funds only when RSB gives prior authorization for payment.

The review by the Deputy Director/designee must be held within thirty (30) calendar days of RSB's receipt of the client's request for review. The client will be notified of the results of this review by certified mail.