



A Message to Vocational Rehabilitation Providers:

As we work together to address the serious circumstances caused by the spread of COVID-19, we want you to know that the Texas Workforce Commission's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program is committed to continuing to serve our customers and work with our providers. The health and safety of our customers, providers, staff and communities is our top priority, so we are implementing measures to ensure that we fully cooperate with the guidance on mitigation strategies issued by federal, state and local authorities.



Mitigation of the Spread of the COVID-19 Virus

This means that we are practicing CDC guidelines regarding hand washing, good respiratory etiquette, cleaning surfaces, and social distancing. By social distancing, we mean that staff are refraining from physical contact (such as hand shaking) with each other and customers. It also means that staff are maintaining at least six feet between themselves and the nearest person. We are also cancelling or postponing any gatherings of 10 or more people and are deploying many of our VR staff to work remotely. We encourage you to comply with guidance from federal, state and local authorities, and to adopt these and other practices to ensure your health and safety and that of your customers and staff.

As we implement these mitigation strategies, some of our offices may need to restrict or limit in-person access by the public. Please know that we are committed to remaining available to our customers and providers through email and telephone. We will use these and other technologies at our disposal to maintain engagement and responsiveness to you and our customers.

We are aware that these measures as well as similar measures being taken by schools, employers, and community partners, though critical to the health and safety of Texans, will disrupt some of the services you deliver. This is particularly the case for services that rely upon in-person close contact and/or group settings. We are actively considering alternate ways to provide services that are safe and viable, and we welcome your creative ideas and solutions to the VR Provider Standards Mailbox link included toward the end of this message.

Impact on Vocational Rehabilitation Operations

In the meanwhile, we are reviewing our current policies, practices and requirements, including those in the VR Standards for Providers Manual (SFP), to determine what we can temporarily waive or modify to support remote service delivery and maintain continuity of services to our customers who need them. Please watch for that information soon. We will send another GovDelivery message and will also post information on the Provider Resources page on the TWC website.

<https://twc.texas.gov/partners/vocational-rehabilitation-providers-resources>

We have also developed a procedure by which VR staff can approve and issue service authorizations electronically, without the need for an original signature from a VR staff member. This will allow staff working remotely to issue service authorizations for those services that are necessary and can be safely delivered without risk to you or the customer. We will issue that procedure to VR staff in the next few days.

In addition, to prevent delays in authorizing payment on services rendered, we are setting up electronic mailboxes to enable us to receive and process invoices from providers in lieu of using postal system. We will share more information on that soon through a GovDelivery message and/or through contact from your regional program specialist.

Please know that as information and circumstances change, we will be as timely and inclusive as possible in our communication. Our goal is to keep our customers, staff, providers and communities safe.

For any customers you are serving who are recipients of SSI or SSDI benefits, effective March 17, all local Social Security offices are closed to the public for in-person service until further notice. However, SSA is still able to provide critical services which are listed at the following website: <http://www.ssa.gov/coronavirus/>. We encourage you to review this website for all information pertaining to SSA field operations and available services.

If you have a question regarding provision of services to a customer related to COVID-19 impact or mitigation measures, please fax or email the question to the VR Standards mailbox at: vr.standards@twc.state.tx.us.

Impacts to Employers and Workers

As providers of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, we understand that some of you also support a workforce as an employer.

With uncertainty surrounding COVID-19, the Texas Workforce Commission continues to offer Texas employers our full support. From legal questions regarding work from home policies to resources for loans, we are here to answer your questions and help ensure things go as smoothly as possible.

We have developed a webpage with resources and information on actions taken by the commission in response to COVID-19. This page will be continuously updated with answers to questions about operating your business during this time. Please visit <https://twc.texas.gov/news/covid-19-resources-employers>.

In an effort to provide you information as quickly as possible, we are developing an email list around COVID 19. Please [sign up here](#) for future updates.

Information about managing multiple layoffs is available at the following site: <https://twc.texas.gov/businesses/mass-claims-unemployment-benefits>. Here you will find information about filing a mass claim for unemployment benefits for your employees and our Rapid Response services.

For information on preventing layoffs by cutting employee hours or furloughing workers, we encourage you to explore [shared work programs](#). These programs are designed to allow employers to supplement their employees' lost wages because of reduced work hours with partial unemployment benefits, for more information, or to apply for a shared work plan visit <https://twc.texas.gov/businesses/shared-work> or email ui.sharedwork@twc.state.tx.us.

COVID-19 Resources

Again, updates and information regarding service delivery during this time will be posted on the Provider Resources page found at: <https://twc.texas.gov/partners/vocational-rehabilitation-providers-resources>

For the latest information on the coronavirus pandemic, including symptoms, how to protect yourself, and travel advisories, visit the [CDC's COVID-19 website](#) found at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html. Included in this website is CDC Guidance for Businesses and Employers: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html.

For state information you may review the Texas Department of State Health Services website: <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/>