# PART C, CHAPTER 6.3: DEAFBLIND SERVICES

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| **Policy Number** | **Authority** | **Scope**  | **Effective Date** |
| Part C, Chapter 6.3 | N/A | All TWC-VR staff, particularly BVI VR Counselors | 9/3/2024 |

## PURPOSE

In accordance with the authority (Federal and State) listed above, this policy is issued by the Texas Workforce Commission Vocational Rehabilitation Division (TWC-VR). Adherence to these rules and regulations issued under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), supports Texans with disabilities in gaining, maintaining, and advancing in competitive integrated employment (CIE).

Specifically, the purpose of this policy and these procedures is to ensure adherence to the provision of DeafBlind Services for customers who are blind and have a secondary disability of a hearing loss.

## DEFINITIONS

Audiological Evaluation: An audiological evaluation is a series of tests administered by an audiologist that is used to determine the type, degree, and configuration of hearing loss.

Blind: A visual acuity with best correction of 20/200 or less in the better eye; a visual field of 20 degrees or less; or a combination of both.

Communication Cards: Low-tech or no-tech tool that helps a person who DeafBlind communicate their needs or ask for assistance.

DeafBlind: A person is DeafBlind if the person has a visual impairment or eye condition that will lead to blindness, and the person’s hearing loss is medically documented or suspected, or if the person is functioning as a person who is DeafBlind.

Informed Choice: The means by which a customer chooses their rehabilitation path, from options based on their needs and circumstances and the TWC-VR rules, as it relates to choosing DeafBlind services and the providers of those services.

Low Vision: A visual acuity with best correction of 20/70 or less in the better eye; a visual field of 30 degrees or less in the better eye; or a combination of both.

Significant Visual Impairment:A disease or condition of the eye that does not meet the definitions of Blind or Low Vision but does create a significant impediment to employment and cannot be corrected with glasses or contact lenses.

## POLICY

### General Overview

TWC-VR ensures that customers who are blind or visually impaired (BVI) and have a secondary disability of hearing loss can access evaluations, training, goods, and services customized and accessible to meet their needs. TWC-VR provides services directly (i.e., in-house) and can purchase services and goods from approved contracted providers. DeafBlind services help customers become confident and independent in accessing or improving communication and obtaining information. These services aid integration into work and community.

Key components of DeafBlind services include the following:

* Referral: A VR Counselor must refer BVI customers who have a documented or suspected hearing loss to the Regional DeafBlind Specialist for evaluation before scheduling audiological or hearing-aid evaluations.
* Initial Assessment: The Regional DeafBlind Specialist provides an initial assessment to identify the customer’s potential training needs and to make recommendations for audiological and hearing evaluations. The assessment report includes evaluation results and makes recommendations for DeafBlind Services (e.g., community resources, equipment and assistive technology and adaptive technology). A VR Counselor uses the assessment report to develop the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) with the customer.
* Training: The Regional DeafBlind Specialist provides training to help the customer use adaptive equipment and identify community resources to help them with self-advocacy, and communication (e.g., ASL interpreters) and helps them create communication cards. The Regional DeafBlind Specialist updates the VR Counselor regularly and at training completion.

### Additional Policy Considerations

* Comparable Services and Benefits: DeafBlind services are exempt from the requirement to secure comparable services and benefits prior to TWC-VR expending funds.
* Customer Participation in the Cost of Services: DeafBlind services are exempt from applying Basic Living Requirements (BLR) and, therefore, the customer is not required to participate in the cost of services.
* Recipients of Social Security Disability Benefits: Recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), due to the customer’s disability, are exempt from the requirement to participate in the cost of TWC-VR services regardless of income.
* Exceptions to Policy: When necessary to meet the VR needs of a customer, TWC-VR staff members may request exceptions to policies and procedures through their chain of management up to the Deputy Division Director of Field Services Delivery, or designee. However, exceptions to policies and procedures based on Federal and State laws, statutes, and rules or regulations are not allowable.

## PROCEDURES

### Referrals for DeafBlind Services

The VR Counselor must contact the DeafBlind Specialist assigned to their region to discuss the needs of the customer and creates a service record.

* Assessment: The DeafBlind Specialist conducts the requested assessments to determine the customer’s need, type, and duration of services and goods. Once completed, the DeafBlind Specialist sends a copy of the results to the VR Counselor, which are then included in the case record.
* Secondary Disability Amendment: If the DeafBlind Specialist recommends that the secondary disability coding be amended to reflect the customer's sensory communicative impairment more accurately, the DeafBlind Specialist—
	+ Enters a case note to recommend that the VR Counselor change the secondary disability coding and explain the reason a change is needed; and
	+ Creates an action and delegates it to the VR Counselor to alert them to the case note which recommends that the secondary disability coding be changed.

### IPE Requirements

After the VR Counselor and the customer agree that DeafBlind services are needed, the specific services are included in the IPE or IPE amendment. DeafBlind Services includes all DeafBlind services, equipment, and devices recommended by the DeafBlind Specialist.

The case record must include the results of the DeafBlind assessment and recommendations.

### Completion of DeafBlind Services

The DeafBlind Specialist closes the RHW service record when services are complete or no longer desired, but DeafBlind specialists may provide limited courtesy services to help a customer maintain independence. These services are documented in the case notes, as applicable.

## APPROVALS & CONSULTATIONS

There are no approvals or consultations for this policy and these procedures.

**REVIEW**

The Policy Planning and Statewide Initiatives Team, or designee, is responsible for reviewing this policy and these procedures and will update the Document History log if necessary.

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| **Date** | **Type** | **Change Description** |
| 9/3/2024 | New | VRSM Policy and Procedure Rewrite |