

## PRESENTATION TO THE 2023 HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES JOINT APPROPRIATION SUBCOMMITTEE

# Disability Employment and Transitions Division

### **Human Services Practice**

Department of Public Health and Human Services

#### **THE FOLLOWING TOPICS ARE COVERED IN THIS REPORT:**

- **Overview**
- **Summary of Major Functions**
- **Highlights and Accomplishments during the 2023 Biennium**
- **Efficiencies and Cost Savings**
- **Funding and FTE Information**
- **Change Packages**

# OVERVIEW

The Disability Employment and Transitions Division (DETD) provides more than 13,000 Montanans with disabilities access to services designed to strengthen their economic and social well-being. Montanans living with disabilities want to be meaningful and integrated contributors to society who actively benefit from and participate in mainstream life. Citizens with disabilities encounter barriers to employment and independence that prevent their full and equitable inclusion in society, including negative attitudes about what it means to have a disability, discriminatory practices that deny or limit access, inadequate economic choices, and shortcomings in disability skills and resources.

DETD encourages individual and family stability, supports a person's ability to work and to be self-sufficient, and works to maximize the opportunities for independence, well-being, and health for people with disabilities. DETD carries out its work according to the values of promoting informed client choice, independent living, and self-advocacy to ensure people with disabilities are integrated into society in every aspect of their lives.

Over the last biennium, DETD expanded engagement with clients and enhanced collaboration with stakeholders to deliver programs and services that fully integrate individuals living with disabilities into society. The transition from dependence to independence is a long-term investment that strengthens Montana's diverse communities beyond the individuals served. Montanans with disabilities count on DETD and its network of disability service partners to overcome these social and economic challenges.

The division continues to implement strong controls to ensure programs are maximized within budgets to provide greater access to services for all persons with disabilities while forging partnerships with the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, local school districts, Centers for Independent Living, community rehabilitation providers, and other local vendors in communities across Montana.



# SUMMARY OF MAJOR FUNCTIONS

DETD consists of five bureaus: Program Operations and Support, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Pre-Employment Transition Services, Blind and Low Vision Services, and Disability Determination Services (DDS). In addition, DETD includes the administratively attached Montana Telecommunications Access Program (MTAP) and multiple smaller programs.

## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

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Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS) support people with disabilities to prepare for, obtain, and advance in meaningful employment by providing a range of services based on an individual's employment goals. The vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors work closely with job seekers to determine an employment goal and then identify and arrange high-quality services that lead to meaningful careers. The principle of informed choice guides the services a person receives while harmonizing with an individual's strengths, resources, interests, and capabilities. The VR program is an integral part of the state's workforce system which delivers services in collaboration with local job services, colleges, community rehabilitation providers, and numerous other partners.

### Business Services

Staff with Montana VR Services work with businesses to understand their unique needs and to offer customized services. Staff help Montana businesses become aware of key disability issues; fill open positions with qualified job seekers with disabilities; assess workplace job descriptions, recruitment, and application processes to remove unnecessary barriers; and provide training with accommodations.



*Aaron Luper of All Electric, LLC pictured with electrical apprentice Tray Lichtenberg*

"I'm so proud of Tray for his commitment to his chosen career path. He is one determined individual, and an inspiration to all of those who know him. I encourage businesses to learn about the state programs that connect individuals with disabilities to employment opportunities."

-Aaron Luper, All Electric LLC Polson, MT

## PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

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The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) requires public vocational rehabilitation programs to set aside at least 15% of their federal funds to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities who are eligible, or potentially eligible, for VR services. This act expanded the population of students with disabilities the agency serves, along with the types of services that VR agencies may provide students with disabilities as they transition from school to postsecondary employment and education.

“It taught me that it’s OK to be who you are and to not necessarily think about what you can’t do, but what you can do, regardless of neuro-disability.”

-Ashlee Logan, VR participant

Pre-ETS are offered to all school-enrolled students with disabilities aged 14 - 21 in Montana. These services provide an early start to job exploration and assist students with disabilities in identifying career interests. These services provide students with disabilities the opportunities to practice and improve workplace readiness skills and to explore post-secondary training options which lead to more industry recognized credentials and meaningful employment. These services are provided in partnership with local education agencies, community rehabilitation providers, and independent living centers.

## BLIND AND LOW VISION SERVICES (BLVS)

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### Independent Living Service for the Older Blind Program (OBP)

These services provide visually impaired or blind individuals over the age of 55 with the ability to live more independently in their homes and community.

### Montana Business Enterprise Program (BEP)

The Business Enterprise Program assists legally blind residents of Montana secure and operate a vending business. Through the Randolph-Sheppard Act and the Montana Business Enterprise Law, blind vendors have access to vending opportunities on federal and state properties. Currently, the BEP’s vending businesses include post offices in Billings, Helena, and Missoula; Montana Women’s Prison; the Capital Building vending machines; and Rocky Mountain Labs in Hamilton.

“With training Eva was able to perform daily living skills including cooking, cleaning, using the telephone, traveling independently, and continuing to sing in the community choir. She can read her bills and other important documents with the tools and training the Older Blind Program provided.”

-Melissa Nielsen, Vision Rehabilitation Therapist

## EXTENDED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

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The Extended Employment program provides support for clients with the most significant disabilities to maintain employment after the end of VR program services. Funding for job support moves from VR to Extended Employment to avoid an interruption in services. Continuous support is provided to the individual and the employer to ensure long-term job retention.

## INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES

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Independent living programs provide Montanans with disabilities the services needed to achieve their desired way of life. These core services include information and referrals to appropriate organizations, independent skills training, individual and systems change advocacy, and peer mentoring. Other services provided include benefits counseling and planning, housing information, help with accessibility issues, and personal care assistance.

## MONTANA TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACCESS PROGRAM

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The Montana Telecommunications Access Program (MTAP) ensures that Montanans who are deaf, deaf/blind, hard-of-hearing, or speech or mobility impaired can use traditional telecommunications equipment and services. MTAP oversees the Montana Relay program, which offers assistive equipment and services to Montanans whose disabilities make it hard for them to use the phone.

Some examples of the type of services the program provides are:

- **Amplified phones:** phones with built-in volume control that makes incoming sounds louder and tone control to make sound clearer.
- **Captioned phones:** phones with technology that allow individuals who are severely hard of hearing to use their voice to converse while reading the other side of the conversation on the screen display of their phone.
- **Traditional Relay Service:** allows users who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have difficulty speaking to connect using a text telephone.
- **Relay Friendly Business Program:** free training designed to eliminate missed connections by educating businesses on how to identify, receive, and place relay calls.



*MTAP Director Mary Taylor presents a Relay Friendly Business certificate to Top Gun Auto Body owner Ted Culbertson*

## OTHER SERVICES

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### Disability Determination Services

The Montana Disability Determination Services (DDS) determines medical eligibility for Social Security disability claims. These determinations are based on federal rules and regulations.

## Public Transportation Coordination

Regardless of age or ability, people need to be able to get around in their community so that they can spend time with family, shop, get to appointments, and live a complete life. The 40 public transit agencies across the state provide accessible and reliable transportation for Montanans with disabilities. The transportation coordinator works with agencies within DPHHS and across the state to improve transportation and provide information on transportation options to their customers.

## DETD includes three citizen councils whose members are appointed by the Governor

- State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)
- State Independent Living Council (SILC)
- Committee on Telecommunications Access Services by Persons with Disabilities

"I am pleased to announce that, with the blessing of the SRC, on August 10, 2022, Category 2 was officially opened, allowing those with significant disabilities direct access to VRBS services. This is a huge success for VRBS and the SRC is so grateful to the hard work of all the VRBS field staff and leadership to meet this huge milestone."

-Emma Rooney, State Rehabilitation Council Chair



**State Rehabilitation Council Members**

*Back row (left to right): Jolene Weatherwax, Chanda Hermanson, Celina Cline, Emma Rooney, Tom Manthey, Brian Tocher, Marcy Roberts*

*Front row (left to right): Doug McElroy, Lacey Keller, Wes Feist, Corinne Moore, Denise May, Gabrielle Broere*

# HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING THE 2023 BIENNIUM

## INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EMPLOYMENT ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

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Pandemic-related layoffs disproportionately impacted the disability community. From March to April 2020, the number of employed working-age people with disabilities fell nationally by 20 percent, while the number of employed working-age people without disabilities decreased by 14 percent. The American Rescue Plan Act prioritized individuals with disabilities as an underserved and underrepresented group in the current labor force.

The Individuals with Disabilities Employment Engagement program augments current VRBS counseling staff by adding ten VR technicians. These technicians support the work of VR counselors by performing duties that do not require a master's degree or counseling certification such as intake, supporting documentation collection, data entry, case management, coordination with community partners, and processing invoices for payment. They expedite applications to reduce the order of selection waiting list and allow VR counselors to focus on the transformative therapeutic rehabilitative relationship they are uniquely qualified to provide. The increased staffing level has allowed the VR program to invite approximately 1,000 more individuals with disabilities off the waitlist to help them enter the workforce than DETD otherwise had the capacity to serve. It is anticipated the program will eliminate the waitlist entirely by the end of the current biennium.

## CROSS-SYSTEMS COLLABORATION: PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES FOR MONTANA FOSTER YOUTH

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Youth with disabilities are overrepresented in foster care nationally and face common challenges of transitioning to adulthood. They have the added challenge of requiring support to accommodate their disability when transitioning across agencies and systems. Montana VRBS has partnered with Child & Family Services to share program knowledge and develop a streamlined referral process not only for Montana foster youth but also for parents who may benefit from vocational rehabilitation. The consistent presence and connection with staff who can ensure uninterrupted services across the continuum of youth and adult services enhances the opportunities for connectivity and community integration in adulthood. These efforts help to prevent school dropout, homelessness, and involvement with the correctional system.

## DISABILITY DETERMINATION SERVICES EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

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DDS completed strategic planning with all staff to set goals and guide our work. Through the process we defined our mission, vision, and values statements and developed a three-year work plan. Staff identified three goals with supporting objectives:

- Customer Experience: Montana DDS optimizes the experience of our customers.
- Workforce: DDS invests in an inclusive and engaged workforce.
- Stewardship: DDS ensures stewardship of Social Security Administration Programs.



# VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION WAITLIST

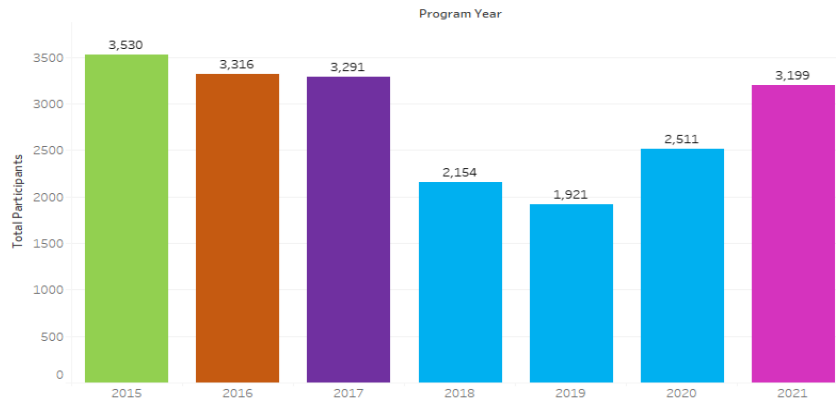
When a VR agency is unable to provide for the full range of services to all eligible individuals who apply and are eligible, the state must create an Order of Selection to ensure that individuals with the most significant disabilities in the state have access to VR services first. In Montana there are three priority categories based on an individual's functional capacity:

- Priority one are those with the most significant disabilities
- Priority two are those with significant disabilities
- Priority three are individuals with disabilities.

Due to program over-enrollment in 2016 all priority categories were closed in March of 2017. In August of 2018 there were approximately 4,000 individuals waiting for services. Since that time the agency has opened priority one and two, meaning all individuals who apply for services that are determined to be in those categories immediately begin work on employment plan development so they can enter training programs or the workforce. At the time this report was written there were only 89 individuals waiting for services in priority three. It is anticipated that the agency will clear the waitlist in January 2023 and the agency will begin the process to formally open all categories.



*Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Order of Selection Timeline*



# EFFICIENCIES AND COST SAVINGS

## REDESIGNATION OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY GRANT

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DPHHS has been the designated Lead Agency for Montana's Assistive Technology (AT) Program and Grant for decades. In the past, the department would receive the grant and contract with the University of Montana to deliver the services through MonTECH. This process was burdensome due to the rigidity of contracting with the University and created an unnecessary fiscal impact on the division. The division worked with the Governor's office and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to redesignate the role and responsibilities of this grant directly to the University of Montana. Eliminating the pass-through process has created business efficiencies for the department and allows MonTECH's staff and management more time to directly serve Montanans with disabilities.

## COMMUNITY WORK INCENTIVES EXPANSION

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Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWICs) provide individual counseling to social security disability beneficiaries seeking employment and intensive follow-up services to ensure individuals are navigating work incentives appropriately. CWICs educate beneficiaries on how employment will impact their public benefits such as SSI, SSDI, Medicare, Medicaid, subsidized housing, and supplemental nutrition benefits to empower individuals with information they need to become wage earners and/or earning more wages. CWICs are typically funded through the Social Security Administration Workforce Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) grant. The current WIPA grant for Montana includes four states and doesn't currently have capacity to provide these services at the rate and quality that is necessary for VRBS clients. VRBS has contracted with the Montana Center for Inclusive Education at MSU-Billings (who currently holds the WIPA grant) to employ one dedicated CWIC to serve Montana VRBS clients efficiently. This partnership will allow our clientele immediate access to this evidenced-based service to increase the participation rate of individuals with disabilities in the workforce and advancing self-sufficiency.

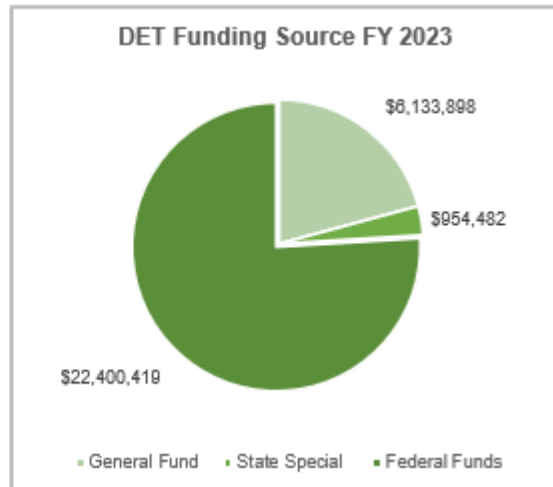
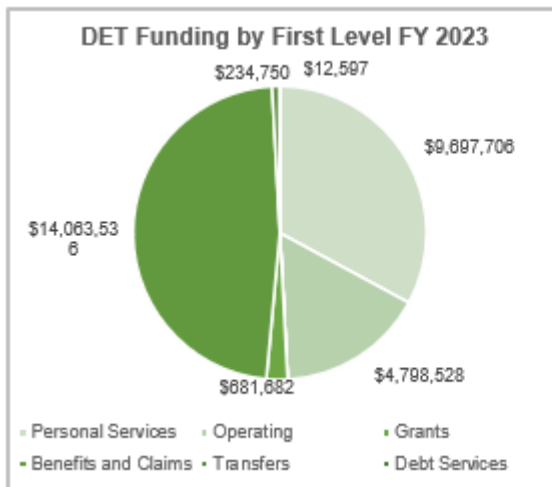
## ONLINE TRAINING MODULES FOR VRBS STAFF

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VRBS has partnered with the Rehabilitation Services Administration-funded Technical Assistance Center to work with The Interwork Institute at San Diego State University to design customized online training modules to be utilized to onboard all new VR staff. This technology and training method will relieve our quality control coordinator and field staff management of providing onboarding training continuously. The training can be accessed by all new staff and will also be used for any staff that have continuing development needs. This advancement will relieve time and effort that was previously put towards these tasks and will ensure consistency statewide.

# FUNDING & FTE INFORMATION

DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT & TRANSITIONS	FY 2023 Budget	FY 2024 Request	FY 2025 Request
FTE	134.07	144.07	144.07
Personal Services	\$9,697,706	\$10,029,865	\$10,087,414
Operating	\$4,798,528	\$5,159,671	\$5,161,836
Grants	\$681,682	\$681,682	\$681,682
Benefits and Claims	\$14,063,536	\$14,301,513	\$14,566,420
Transfers	\$234,750	\$234,750	\$234,750
Debt Services	\$12,597	\$12,597	\$12,597
<b>TOTAL COSTS</b>	<b>\$29,488,799</b>	<b>\$30,420,078</b>	<b>\$30,744,699</b>
	<b>FY 2023 Budget</b>	<b>FY 2024 Request</b>	<b>FY 2025 Request</b>
General Fund	\$6,133,898	\$6,534,652	\$6,590,527
State Special Fund	\$954,482	\$1,150,461	\$1,155,400
Federal Fund	\$22,400,419	\$22,734,965	\$22,998,772
<b>TOTAL FUNDS</b>	<b>\$29,488,799</b>	<b>\$30,420,078</b>	<b>\$30,744,699</b>



# CHANGE PACKAGES

## PRESENT LAW ADJUSTMENTS

### SWPL 1 – Personal Services

The request includes reductions of \$312,829 in FY 2024 and \$254,327 in FY 2025 to annualize various personal services costs including FY 2023 statewide pay plan, benefit rate adjustments, longevity adjustments related to incumbents in each position at the time of the snapshot, and vacancy savings.

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
<b>FY 2024</b>	\$164,323	\$12,862	(\$490,014)	(\$312,829)
<b>FY 2025</b>	\$174,950	\$14,325	(\$443,602)	(\$254,327)
<b>Biennium Total</b>	\$339,273	\$27,187	(\$933,616)	(\$567,156)

### SWPL 3 – Inflation Deflation

The request includes an increase of \$169,544 in FY 2024 and \$210,687 in FY 2025 to reflect budgetary changes generated from the application of inflation to specific expenditure accounts. Affected accounts include those associated with supplies & materials, communications, repair & maintenance, state motor pool, and other services.

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
<b>FY 2024</b>	\$12,273	\$38,457	\$118,814	\$169,544
<b>FY 2025</b>	\$14,429	\$45,242	\$151,016	\$210,687
<b>Biennium Total</b>	\$26,702	\$83,699	\$269,830	\$380,231

## NEW PROPOSALS

### NP 1002 – MTAP FTE and Equipment

This new proposal requests the transfer of 1.00 FTE from the Healthcare Facilities Division to the Disability Employment and Transitions Division for outreach efforts and to more efficiently allocate Montana Telecommunications Access Program (MTAP) funds to those in need. This change package requests \$286,011 in total state special funds over the biennium. This change package is contingent on passage and approval of proposed legislation (LC 0266).

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
<b>FY 2024</b>	\$0	\$144,660	\$0	\$144,660
<b>FY 2025</b>	\$0	\$141,351	\$0	\$141,351
<b>Biennium Total</b>	\$0	\$286,011	\$0	\$286,011

## NP 1003 – Rehab Tech FTE Positions

This new proposal requests the transfer of 8.00 FTE from the Healthcare Facilities Division to the Disability Employment and Transitions Division for vocational rehabilitation technicians supporting individuals with disabilities to strengthen Montana's workforce. This change package requests \$1,187,744 in total funds over the biennium including \$276,408 in general fund and \$911,336 in federal funds.

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
<b>FY 2024</b>	\$147,531	\$0	\$463,365	\$610,896
<b>FY 2025</b>	\$128,877	\$0	\$447,972	\$576,849
<b>Biennium Total</b>	\$276,408	\$0	\$911,337	\$1,187,745

## NP 1004 – WIOA Business Services FTE

This new proposal requests the transfer of 1.00 FTE from the Healthcare Facilities Division to the Disability Employment and Transitions Division to better serve Montana businesses and coordinate with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners statewide. This change package requests \$159,487 in total funds over the biennium including \$38,516 in general fund and \$120,971 in federal funds.

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
<b>FY 2024</b>	\$19,569	\$0	\$61,462	\$81,031
<b>FY 2025</b>	\$18,947	\$0	\$59,509	\$78,456
<b>Biennium Total</b>	\$38,516	\$0	\$120,971	\$159,487

## NP 1015 – Prov Rate Adj - Voc Rehab & Blind Services

This new proposal requests \$595,018 over the biennium for provider rate adjustments. For provider types that were included in the 2023 Biennium provider rate study, the requested increase is a portion of the study's rate proposals. The requested increase for providers not included in the provider rate study is estimated at 4% in FY 2024 and an additional 4% in FY 2025. Those providers eligible for the statutory increases in 53-6-125, MCA, are not captured in this proposal as their adjustment is already included in the Medicaid caseload change packages. Funding for additional one-time-only provider rate adjustments intended to stabilize the care delivery system post-pandemic is included in CP 4444. The biennial request includes \$176,484 in general funds, and \$418,534 in federal funds.

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
<b>FY 2024</b>	\$57,058	\$0	\$135,313	\$192,371
<b>FY 2025</b>	\$119,426	\$0	\$283,221	\$402,647
<b>Biennium Total</b>	\$176,484	\$0	\$418,534	\$595,018

## NP 1016 – Prov Rate Adj - Disability Determination

This new proposal requests \$145,843 over the biennium for provider rate adjustments. For provider types that were included in the 2023 Biennium provider rate study, the requested increase is a portion of the study's rate proposals. The requested increase for providers not included in the provider rate study is estimated at 4% in FY 2024 and an additional 4% in FY 2025. Those providers eligible for the statutory increases in 53-6-125, MCA, are not captured in this proposal as their adjustment is already included in the Medicaid caseload change packages. Funding for additional one-time-only provider rate adjustments intended to stabilize the care delivery system post-pandemic is included in CP 4444. This change package is funded with 100% federal funds.

	<b>General Fund</b>	<b>State Special</b>	<b>Federal Funds</b>	<b>Total Request</b>
<b>FY 2024</b>	\$0	\$0	\$45,606	\$45,606
<b>FY 2025</b>	\$0	\$0	\$100,237	\$100,237
<b>Biennium Total</b>	\$0	\$0	\$145,843	\$145,843