

Quick Reference Guide

Understanding the Disability Service System

The logo for the National Disability Institute (ndi) is located in the top right corner. It consists of the lowercase letters "ndi" in a white, sans-serif font, set against a dark blue square background. A thin blue horizontal line is positioned below the square.

The disability service system includes government agencies that provide funding and oversight to community-based organizations and companies that support persons with disabilities. It is based on federal, state and local funding that support persons with disabilities who live, learn and work in their communities. The system can be quite complex to navigate initially. Many agencies and organizations work in silos, and individuals with disabilities have to go to more than one organization/provider depending on the services they need. There are organizations that support individuals in various ways such as assisting with public benefits, employment, community living, assistive technology and rehabilitation. Not only are there different organizations, but there are also different eligibility criteria for most, if not all, of these services.

To understand how the disability service system works, it is necessary to understand that the services provided to people with disabilities are funded by various entities, such as Medicaid and the Social Security Administration (SSA). It is important to have an understanding of the disability service system in order to understand why some people with disabilities receive some services, while others do not. It also helps with understanding the fears people with disabilities have regarding losing eligibility for public benefits and/or not having funding for certain supports. For example, an individual with a disability may be interested in obtaining a job. Typically, the first step is vocational rehabilitation (VR), where a person may or may not qualify for services. If they do not qualify for whatever reason, they may go to a Medicaid provider who has an employment program where different eligibility criteria may exist. This can continue until all necessary services are found. This can be time-consuming and, at times, frustrating.

This quick reference guide will provide you with information on the various types of services provided by the disability service system, as well as the funding source/s involved and program qualifications.

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Disability Service Systems

To assist in identifying the local disability partners in your area, the following provides a brief description of the multiple service providers that exist at the federal, state and local levels.

Department of Health and Human Services

Each state has their own Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which may also be called Social Services. Departments of Health and Human Services are responsible for the administration of Medicaid and other programs, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). To find the HHS office in your state, visit: [acf.hhs.gov/state-human-services-agencies](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/state-human-services-agencies).

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) provides healthcare coverage to more than 153 million people through Medicare, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and the Health Insurance Marketplace. Their parent agency is the Federal Department of Health and Human Services. To find CMS resources in your state, visit: [cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/American-Indian-Alaska-Native/AIAN/LTSS-TA-Center/info/state-resources-map.html](https://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/American-Indian-Alaska-Native/AIAN/LTSS-TA-Center/info/state-resources-map.html).

The Social Security Administration

The Social Security Administration manages the two largest federal disability programs that provide assistance to people with disabilities—Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). While these two programs are different in many ways, SSA administers both and only individuals who meet SSA's definition of disability and other qualifying factors are eligible for benefits under either or both programs. To learn more about Social Security Administration, visit [ssa.gov](https://www.ssa.gov).

Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work

Program Ticket to Work program can connect individuals with disabilities seeking employment with an Employment Network (EN) that provides various employment support services. To find Employment Networks in your area, visit: [choosework.ssa.gov/findhelp/](https://www.choosework.ssa.gov/findhelp/).

It is important to understand the disability service system in order to know why some people with disabilities receive some services, while others do not.

Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA)

WIPA projects are organizations within your community that provide free benefits counseling to Social Security disability beneficiaries to help them make informed choices about work. WIPAs are staffed by Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs), who provide in-depth counseling about working, earning more money and how working may affect a person's benefits. WIPA services are prioritized for individuals who are working or actively seeking work, and youth under age 26. To locate the WIPA project in your area, visit: [choosework.ssa.gov/findhelp/](https://www.choosework.ssa.gov/findhelp/).

Veterans Services

There are numerous organizations that support Veterans, including the Veterans Administration (VA), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, American Veterans (AMVETS), Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and the Vietnam Veterans of America. The services provided by these organizations vary from providing direct service to supporting organizations to serving as a referral source. Some may work with Veterans directly, others may be support organizations and others referral organizations. To learn more about organizations that support Veterans, visit: [va.gov](https://www.va.gov).

Department of Vocational Rehabilitation

Each state has a Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) with the goal of assisting persons with disabilities obtain and maintain employment. Almost half of the states have a separate DVR which provides services only to individuals who have a visual impairment or are blind. Vocational Rehabilitation counselors guide individuals with disabilities through service programs they need to reach their employment goal. Services offered to those who qualify include, but are not limited to, vocational counseling and guidance, evaluations, work readiness, training including tuition, youth services, modifications to homes and job development and placement. To locate the DVR office in your area, visit: [rsa.ed.gov/about/states](https://www.rsa.ed.gov/about/states).