

Oregon Deaf-Blind Services Task Force

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DBSTF, the Oregon Deaf-Blind Services Task Force, comprised of stakeholder agencies and advocates, has been meeting since 2012, alternating between the Portland offices of Independent Living Resources and the Oregon Commission for the Blind.

Current estimates of the **Deaf-Blind** population of the US are between 1.2 and 1.9 million, with 10,000 to 20,000 Deaf-Blind Oregonians. Approximately 8% of Deaf-Blind people are children and youth, 15-20% are of working age, and the remainder are seniors, with an incidence of 7%--20% of all people aged 70 and older. By Deaf-Blind (DB) we mean all people with significant combined losses of both hearing and vision, including those with some residual hearing and/or vision. Research shows that because of the interactive disabling effects of hearing and vision impairments, Deaf-Blindness is among the most severe conditions impacting educational and vocational achievements and basic quality of life, and requiring supports to enable Deaf-Blind people to perform many functions. Deaf-Blindness is on the short list of conditions established by the Social Security Administration that entitle people without jobs to automatically receive SSI.

Targeted special services assist Deaf-Blind people to lead productive lives. The FCC currently offers \$10 million annually to provide Deaf-Blind Americans with essential telecommunications equipment, while a number of states, but not Oregon, have programs offering Support Service Providers to assist Deaf-Blind citizens at home and in the community. The Oregon Commission for the Blind and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services provide career counseling, job training and limited-duration job support services that enable Deaf-Blind Oregonians to work. However, providers and community members recognize there are insufficient adjunct services to empower Deaf-Blind citizens to achieve and retain optimal employment and fully participate in society.

DBSTF has established these priorities for services to DB Oregonians:

1. Outreach to identify Oregonians of all ages with disabling combined vision and hearing loss.
2. Central coordination of services and case management.
3. Training personal adjustment and family counselors who understand the uniqueness of DB people.
4. Training & provision of Support Service Providers for DB people in the community and at home.
5. Training & provision of DB-skilled sign language interpreters, captioners & communication device specialists.