



The Digest of Administrative Reports to the Governor
Department of Aging and Disability Services
Fiscal Year 2024-2025

At a Glance

Agency:	Department of Aging and Disability Services
Commissioner:	Amy L. Porter
Established:	2011
Statutory Authority:	Public Act 11-44, 18-169
Central Office:	55 Farmington Avenue, Hartford CT 06105
Web address:	https://portal.ct.gov/ADS
Total employees:	388
Total budget appropriation:	\$113,117,200 with approximately 70% federal and 30% state funding.

Mission

Maximizing opportunities for the independence and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut.

ADS Administrative Responsibilities

Bureau of Organizational Support

This partially centralized business unit provides a range of fiscal services for the department, including budget preparation and monitoring, accounting, vendor setup, accounts payable and receivables, and asset management.

Human Resources

The Human Resources Division is centralized through the Department of Administrative Services, and available to support Aging and Disability Services by providing technical guidance and support for all the employees of the agency. Human Resources staff are involved in addressing issues which impact human resource management for the agency, through coordination of policy issues, involvement in labor relations activity and, in general, with the objective of ensuring that the quality of human resource service throughout the department remains consistent.

Legislative/Legal

The Legislative/Legal unit is comprised of the agency's legislative liaison and the staff attorneys. The staff attorneys act as in-house counsel on a wide range of issues involving every aspect of the department's work, including researching, interpreting, analyzing, and applying complex and conflicting laws and regulations. They also act as hearing officers and represent Aging and Disability Services in formal administrative and public proceedings. The legislative liaison advises on and coordinates legislative proposals and provides advocacy and representation at the General Assembly on behalf of Aging and Disability Services. The liaison currently serves as the ethics liaison for the agency as well.

Communications

The Communications Office is responsible for all departmental communications. This includes media inquiries, social media and agency websites. The Public Information Office also acts as the conduit for all Freedom of Information Act requests.

Statutory Responsibility

The Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) provides a wide range of services to individuals with disabilities and older adults who need assistance in maintaining or achieving their full potential for self-direction, self-reliance and independent living. The primary customers of the agency are individuals with disabilities, older adults, and in our employment-based programs we also have businesses/employers as a dual customer.

Legislative authority generally resides in Chapter 319/ of the General Statutes in the following sections:

- Part I - General Provisions
CGS §§ 17a-780 – 809
- Part II - Education of, and Services for, the Blind
CGS §§ 17a-810 – 834
- Part III - Deaf, Deafblind and Hearing-Impaired Persons
CGS §§ 17a-835 – 849
- Part IV - Services for the Elderly

CGS §§ 17a-850 – 869

- Part V - Office of the Long Term Care Ombudsman
- CGS §§ 17a-870 – 889

And in the following provisions:

- CGS § 7-127b - Municipal agents for elderly persons
- CGS § 14-11b - Driver Training program for persons with disabilities
- CGS § 31-283a - Rehabilitation programs for employees suffering compensable injuries

Aging and Disability Services' Administration encompasses the Commissioner's Office, as well as the functional areas of legal, legislative, strategic planning, communications, operational readiness, fiscal, facilities and asset management, and payroll. Human Resources, Equal Employment Opportunity and Information Technology services are provided in partnership with the Department of Administrative Services. The department has five programmatic areas, including:

- Bureau of Aging Services (BOA);
- The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP);
- Bureau of Disability Determination Services (DDS);
- Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB); and
- Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS).

Our programs, policies and practices are designed to:

- Deliver integrated aging and disability services responsive to the needs of Connecticut citizens;
- Provide leadership on aging and disability issues statewide;

- Provide and coordinate aging and disability programs and services in the areas of employment, education, independent living, accessibility and advocacy;
- Advocate for the rights of Connecticut residents with disabilities and older adults; and
- Serve as a resource on aging and disability issues at the state level.

Core Values

INTEGRITY: We interact honestly and fairly with all others, adhering to strong ethics, values and principles.

RESPECT: We value and recognize others for their unique skills, talents and contributions, and are considerate in all interactions.

PROFESSIONALISM: We are mindful of our daily conduct and strive to have the highest work standards with a courteous attitude.

OPEN COMMUNICATION: We encourage the sharing of information and knowledge in an accurate, honest and supportive way.

Public Service

While each program has its own legislative requirements and program effectiveness standards, Aging and Disability Services focuses on our mission of ***Maximizing opportunities for the independence and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut.***

Major Programs and Highlights of SFY24:

The Bureau of Aging

The Bureau of Aging administers federal Older Americans Act programs for supportive services, in-home services, and congregate and home-delivered meals. It also administers programs that provide senior community employment, health insurance counseling, and respite care for caregivers. Further, the unit provides oversight of and leadership for the Coalition for Elder Justice in Connecticut.

- **Elderly Nutrition Program:** The Elderly Nutrition Program serves nutritionally balanced home-delivered and congregate meals, provides other nutrition services, and offers opportunities for socialization to individuals aged 60 and older and their spouses. The Elderly Nutrition Program is supported by State and Federal funds as well as local funds and voluntary client contributions. State and Federal funds are distributed to Connecticut's five Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) who, in turn, contract with local Elderly Nutrition Projects for meals and nutrition services.

In FFY23*, over 2 million congregate and home-delivered meals were provided. State funds totaling \$3,150,349 were received for the Elderly Nutrition Program in SFY24. Total federal and state funding in FFY23* was \$12,387,065. Total Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (CSLFRF) funding received through the state legislature was \$2,250,000. These CSLFRF funds were allocated by the legislature in SFY24 (\$ 750,000 directly to the ENPs and \$1,500,000 to the AAAs for meals); the AAAs and ENPs received these funds in SFY24, and funds must be expended or obligated by 12/31/2024.

- **Connecticut Statewide Respite Program:** In partnership with the Area Agencies on Aging, the Statewide Respite Care Program offers short-term respite care to provide relief to caregivers of persons with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. The program provides assessments, the development of care plans, and provision of case management by Care Managers at the Area Agency on Aging, along with the purchase of necessary respite services.

In SFY24, \$1,907,096 was received in state funds for this program, with 648 caregivers and 485 care recipients receiving respite services through this program. Care Managers provided 3,695 hours of case management to caregivers on behalf of care recipients.

- **National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP):** In partnership with the Area Agencies on Aging, this program offers a range of services that enable caregivers to care for their loved ones. The major components of the program include information about available services, access to supportive services, case management, support groups, caregiver training, respite care and supplemental services. Priority consideration is given to those with the greatest social and economic need. In FFY23*, \$2,194,979 in federal funds were received to implement

these services. In FFY23*, 1,005 caregivers - older relative caregivers caring for people under the age of 18 - received the following amounts of supportive services: 452 caregivers received respite, a combined 9280 hours of a combination of caregiver counseling, caregiver training and case management provided during FFY23*. 2490 caregivers inclusive of grandparents and relative kin were served via a total of 13 support groups throughout the state including both in person and virtually. There were 681 caregivers who received supplemental services, such as medical related equipment, to enhance their care plans. Notably, caregivers received 58,051 hours of respite services which helped relieve them from caregiving duties. There were a total of 75 public education events across the state to market caregiver programs.

- **CHOICES: Connecticut's program for Health insurance assistance, Outreach, Information and referral, Counseling and Eligibility Screening** (CHOICES). The department manages CHOICES, the state health insurance assistance program. CHOICES provides objective counseling, outreach and training services in partnership with Connecticut's five Area Agencies on Aging and the Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.

In SFY24, 166 certified CHOICES team members spent 10,936 hours counseling Medicare beneficiaries in 16,855 counseling contacts. A total of 8,029 beneficiaries received assistance with Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage Plan comparisons and enrollments. An additional 20,788 Medicare beneficiaries received eligibility screening, benefits explanation and/or application assistance for the Medicare Savings Program, Medicaid and/or Extra Help/Low- Income Subsidy programs. CHOICES participated in 328 outreach events (some virtual, some in-person) providing Medicare-related education and information to 22,824 attendees. CHOICES conducted two New Team Member Training Sessions in SFY24. Sixty-six in-kind professionals and volunteers became certified CHOICES Team Members during this period. CHOICES received 1,079,918 in state funding and \$972,449 in federal funding.

- **Service Navigation Services:** The Bureau of Aging provides funding and support to Connecticut's five Area Agencies on Aging to provide Service Navigation services to adults 60 and older, their caregivers and adults ages 18 to 65 with a disability. Services include application assistance, benefits counseling, case consultation,

options counseling and short-term support. These services, provided by Services Navigators, guide clients through the complex long-term services and supports system and assist clients in resolving challenges faced in accessing supportive services. Service Navigators support clients and their caregivers as they are faced with complex issues such as housing, long-term care services, medical needs, and in-home care. During SFY24, Area Agencies on Aging provided Service Navigation services to 1,249 individuals. In SFY24, the Area Agencies on Aging received \$500,000 in state funding and additional American Rescue Plan funds through Older Americans Act Title III B and E to support two Service Navigators per AAA.

- **Connecticut Statewide Fall Prevention Initiative:** In SFY24 the Connecticut Community Care(CCC) entered its fourth contract year with the Bureau of Aging as the program manager and facilitator of the Tai Ji Quan Moving for Better Balance (TJQMBB) program. TJQMBB is an evidence-based fall prevention program proven to reduce falls in older adult populations. CCC has become a trusted provider of TJQMBB trainer certification through a collaborative agreement with the Dartmouth Center on Health and Aging and over their four years of program implementation has grown the TJQMBB network to 40 partner sites and 870 participants. In SFY24, the TJQMBB program was supported through state funds in the amount of \$50,000 and reached a total of 203 participants. Looking forward to SFY25, the department anticipates the creation of a falls prevention coalition supported through a Memorandum of Agreement with the Department of Public Health and technical assistance from the National Council on Aging, new community-based programming implemented in collaboration with first responders, and a Request for Applications for a comprehensive, coordinated statewide falls prevention program.
- **Coalition for Elder Justice in Connecticut (CEJC):** The Coalition is a multidisciplinary statewide system of stakeholders partnering to better understand and develop strategies to protect older Connecticut citizens from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The Coalition continues to work toward advancing the rights of older adults and creating awareness to prevent elder abuse. The Coalition collaborates with public and private partners on elder abuse and elder rights issues. The Coalition continues to improve communications, foster new partnerships and maintain relationships with long-term partners through the Coalition's website, a newsletter, through social media, and the annual Elder Justice networking events. Members of the Coalition have also partnered with one another on several occasions during the

last fiscal year to share information and resources related to the rights of older adults and abuse prevention.

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) provides individual advocacy to residents of skilled nursing facilities, residential care homes, assisted living facilities and now the community. The State Long Term Care Ombudsman also advocates for systemic changes in policy and legislation to protect the health, safety, welfare and rights of individuals who reside in those settings continues to develop a community advocacy program within available appropriations. The LTCOP responds to and investigates complaints brought forward by residents, individuals, family members and/or others acting on their behalf. All communication with the residents, individuals and their family members or legal guardians, as applicable, is held in strict confidentiality.

The Ombudsman Program has an operating budget of \$ 2,358,783

- Federal Funds: \$ 388,252 (\$ 233,255 from Title VII, Chapter 2 of the Older Americans Act, and \$ 154,997 from Title IIIB of the Older Americans Act)
- Other Federal Funds: \$ 216,524

State Funds: \$ 1,754,006

- **Resident Councils:** The Coalition of Presidents of Resident Councils is an organization of residents of long-term care facilities who work to improve the quality of care and the services in their homes and affect positive change in larger systems such as state and federal governments. The Executive Board of Presidents of Resident Councils is formed to represent the interests of the Coalition and to develop legislative initiatives.
- **VOICES:** The VOICES forum is an annual event jointly convened by the LTCOP and the Statewide Coalition of Presidents of Resident Councils. It is an opportunity for Presidents of Resident Councils from around the state to gather and discuss issues and concerns in their homes and to provide input into legislative proposals for the upcoming legislative session. The Ombudsman

developed materials for nursing home residents that focused on ensuring high quality care is received. This year, the 27th VOICES forum, centered on the theme "Receiving Quality Care Through Goals, Preferences, and Priorities."

- **Resident Advocates:** Resident Advocates are volunteers that are trained by Ombudsman staff in residents' rights and problem solving. Resident Advocates are asked to spend four hours per week in one assigned nursing home and help residents solve problems or concerns.
- **Advocacy:**
The Mission of the Connecticut Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is to protect the health, safety, welfare, and rights of individuals receiving long-term services and supports by:
 - Investigating complaints and concerns made by or on behalf of individuals in a timely and prompt manner.
 - Bringing individuals to the forefront to voice their concerns directly to public officials on issues affecting their lives.
 - Supporting individuals in their quest to shape their own legislative agenda and to represent their interests before governmental agencies.
 - In SFY24, the Ombudsman program staff diligently investigated complaints and concerns raised by or on behalf of residents. Despite their efforts, the persistent rise in the number of complaints posed a challenge. Consequently, the program faced difficulty in ensuring that residents maintained regular and timely access to its services.
 - 4,711 complaints received;
 - 2,333 cases were closed;
 - 1,571 consultations were provided to individuals; and
 - 333 consultations were provided for information and assistance to staff
- **Technology:** Technology resources have proven to be a resource that allows the office to keep residents and family members informed while also gaining an understanding of what is happening from their point of view. The program continues to use Facebook Live and other social media to connect with residents and family members.

Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind

The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) is responsible for the coordination and provision of services to all Connecticut residents who are legally blind or have significant visual impairments.

BESB maintains a confidential registry of people who are blind in Connecticut and provides comprehensive independent living services, adaptive aids and devices and volunteer supports, among other rehabilitative services, to individuals of all ages who are legally blind, DeafBlind, or visually impaired with a goal of maximizing independence and community inclusion.

BESB has four separate service programs which provide a full range of services to clients of all ages who are legally blind or have significant visual impairments:

- **The Adult Services Program** serves as the central intake for clients and provides independent living training to adults to assist them with maintaining independence within the home and the community. In SFY24, 350 independent living services were provided to 186 Adult Blind clients (under age 55), and 2,328 independent living services were provided to 482 Older Blind clients (55 and over). Twenty-two clients received DeafBlind Community Inclusion grant services.
- **The Children's Services Program** provides braille instruction, mobility instruction, adaptive technology devices and training, braille and large print textbooks, and independent living training to children, as well as professional development training and technical assistance to school districts. Under Statutory requirements, the bureau provides any school district the services of Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments to address the vision-related developmental needs of students who are blind, DeafBlind, or visually impaired upon written request. A total of 958 children received services through the Children's Services Program, including preschool services, braille instruction, adaptive technology training, mobility training and expanded core curriculum training. There were 93 students who are blind or visually impaired that took part in BESB's in-person and virtual extra-curricular programs - including Skills for Life virtual travel training camp and Leap into Life in-person and virtual transition program.

- **The Vocational Rehabilitation Program** provides school-to-work transition services to youth who are blind or have visual impairments and assists adults to obtain, retain and advance in employment. The program also provides technical assistance and job candidate referral services to employers across the state. During SFY24, 784 participants were served under BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these, 648 were served under an individualized employment plan and 80 clients achieved employment. The average hourly wages for these consumers were \$25.27.
- **The Business Enterprise Program** offers entrepreneurial opportunities to people who are blind to manage their own food service and gift store businesses at public facilities. During SFY24, gross program sales from the vending facilities exceeded \$2 million with gross profits surpassing \$1 million. There were 18 vending facility operators, who employed an additional 15 workers. Average annual income for the vending facility operators was \$65,000.

Bureau of Disability Determination Services

The Bureau of Disability Determination Services is responsible for deciding medical eligibility for the Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income programs. These programs provide cash benefits and medical insurance to individuals who are unable to maintain employment due to the severity of their disabilities.

33,700 Social Security disability claims were adjudicated during SFY24.

Individuals with disabilities can apply for benefits or inquire about the status of their application by visiting <http://www.ssa.gov/>.

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) strives to create opportunities that enable individuals with significant disabilities to work competitively and live independently. Staff works to provide individualized services, develop effective partnerships, and share sufficient information so that consumers and their families may make informed choices about the rehabilitation process and employment options.

The Bureau hosts several programs:

- **The Vocational Rehabilitation Program** is designed to help individuals with disabilities to prepare for, obtain, maintain or advance in employment. In FFY23*, 5,343 consumers were assisted in the BRS Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these 4,121 were served under an individualized employment plan and 805 achieved employment. Average hourly wages for those who achieved employment were \$26.64.
- **Level Up:** In addition to assisting adults, the Vocational Rehabilitation program also provides students with pre-employment services including tools, training and resources to develop their future potential to work competitively and forge a path to independence. Services include job exploration, counseling for post-secondary pursuits, work-based learning experiences, work-readiness training and self-advocacy. In FFY23*, 2,496 students with disabilities were served in the Level Up program and 526 students were served in community work-based experiences.
- **The Workforce Outreach Team** (formerly Connect Ability Staffing) is a component of the Vocational Rehabilitation program dedicated to preparing and qualifying workers for Connecticut's labor market through the development of in-demand career pathways programming and supports. BRS Workforce Counselors are strategically located across the state in conjunction with the regional workforce development boards and review the needs of businesses, offer qualified candidates and assist in developing training plans before the new trainee/employee starts working.
- **The Connect to Work Project** allows individuals who receive Social Security disability benefits to better understand the impact returning to work will have on their disability benefits. 678 new consumers met with the Connect to Work Project benefits specialists. 562 individuals received benefits analysis services and 1,594 follow-ups were completed. There were also 84 presentations and other outreach activities targeting underserved populations, especially young adults transitioning from high school to post-secondary education or work, and individuals with developmental disabilities.
- **The Connecticut Tech Act Project** increases independence and improves the lives of people with disabilities by providing access to and acquisition of assistive technology devices and services for work, school and community living. 2,180

individuals received assistive technology services for independent living, educational assistance and employment support. 148 assistive technology related training opportunities were provided to a total of 1,759 attendees, and 123 public awareness activities took place. In addition to the services above, the CT Tech Act Project has collaborated with the Bureau on Aging to deliver a two-year pilot program called Bridging the Digital Divide to help individuals with disabilities and older adults have access to mobile technology and training to utilize the devices for social engagement, community access, telehealth and to reduce social isolation. The program began in October of 2022 and has connected with over 530 individuals and 69 organizations in Connecticut to help close the divide.

- **The Employment Opportunities Program** enables individuals with the most significant disabilities to engage in competitive employment by providing funding for long-term supports to maintain competitive employment. In SFY24, this program assisted 128 individuals.
- **The Independent Living Program** provides comprehensive independent living services to persons with significant disabilities through contracts with Connecticut's five community-based Centers for Independent Living. In FFY23*, 6,202 distinct services were provided. In addition, 275 Independent Living Part B clients were served.
- **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services** include the Counseling Program, a Human Services Advocate and the Aging and Disability Services Interpreter Registry. The Counseling Program provides counseling services related to special language, communication and socioeconomic challenges unique to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. There were 2040 Deaf and Hard of Hearing Counseling Services performed during SFY24 (which may include multiple referrals and services during one session). The Human Service Advocate provides direct consumer service and technical support for communication access issues. 53 Consumers were served. The department also monitors and posts a statewide Interpreter Registry for all sign language interpreters working in Connecticut in accordance with state statute. There were 485 interpreters listed on the Connecticut Registry at the end of the fiscal year.
- **The Driver Training Program** provides assessments and training for State of Connecticut residents with physical disabilities who seek to be licensed to drive a

modified vehicle. A total of 278 clients were served during SFY24. Of these, 143 clients completed the program, 43 were actively receiving services, and 92 had requested services.

- **The Workers' Rehabilitation Program** assists individuals with work-related injuries to return to the workforce. During SFY24, 316 initial interviews were completed in the Workers' Rehabilitation Services program. A total of 210 clients achieved employment.

**Please note, some numbers were captured under the latest full Federal Fiscal Year reporting due to funding source, which ran from October 2023 to September 2024.*

Additional Information as Required by Statute

- Aging and Disability Services has a memorandum of agreement with the Department of Administrative Services for all **Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity** (AA/EEO) programs and services. Under the direction of the Commissioner, the agency is responsible for ensuring compliance with a wide variety of federal and state laws and department policies that address equal employment and education. Activities related to the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act include investigating grievances as well as determining, documenting and providing reasonable accommodations.
- **Affirmative Action Plan:** During the reporting period the Affirmative Action Plan was approved without condition. Aging and Disability Services has successfully achieved goals in many categories and classifications, thereby upholding its commitment toward achieving parity in the workforce. The department supports affirmative action and diversity in the workplace and actively seeks applicants from all sectors of the population and takes seriously the commitment to develop a workforce that reflects the diversity of the state and the client population it serves.