

***Presentation to the 2021 Health and Human Services  
Joint Appropriation Subcommittee***

**Disability Employment and Transitions Division**

**Economic Security Services Branch  
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 2021 Biennium**
- **Funding and FTE Information**
- **Change Packages**

## Overview

The Disability Employment and Transitions Division (DETD) provides more than 24,000 Montanans with disabilities access to services to strengthen their economic and social well-being across their life span. Montanans living with disabilities want to be meaningful and integrated contributors to society, actively benefiting from and participating in mainstream life. Citizens with disabilities encounter many 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, among others.

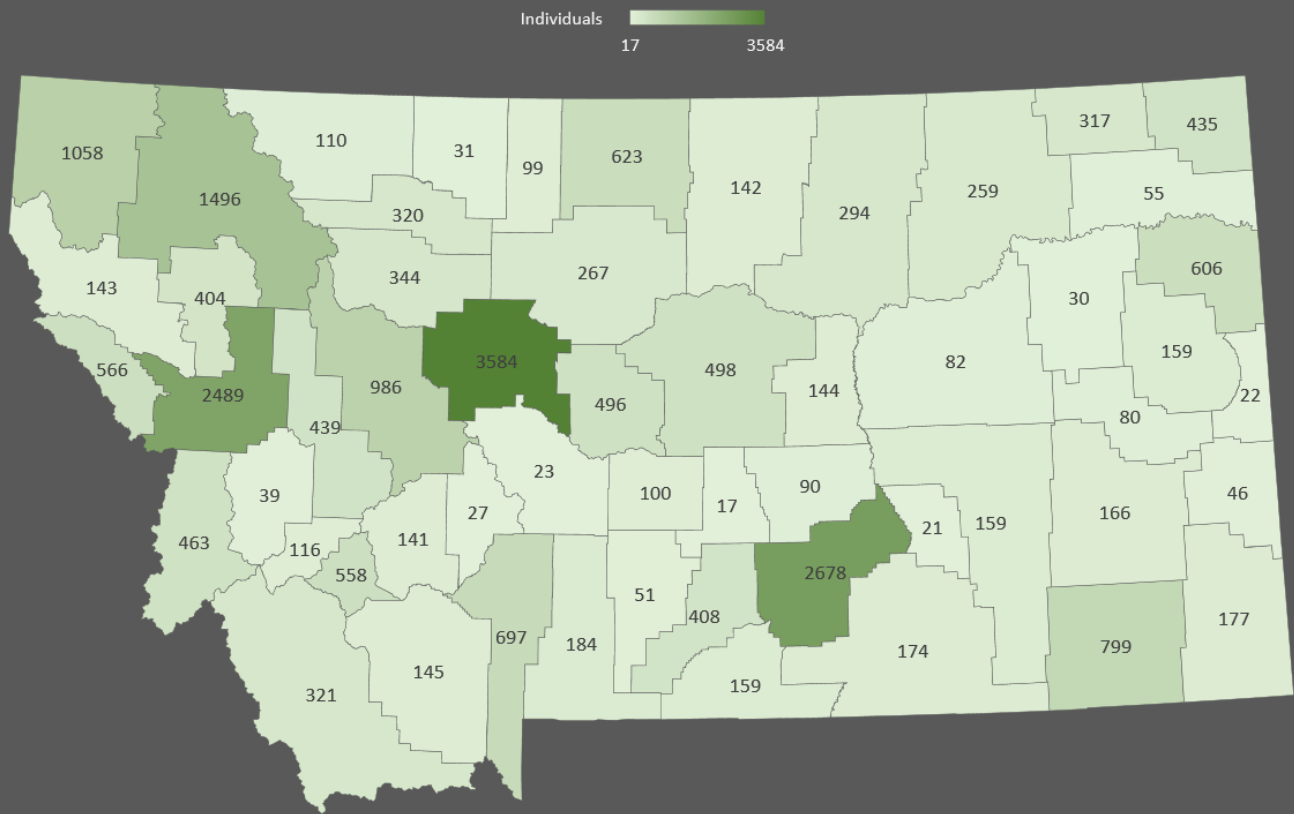
This Division aims to encourage individual and family stability, support a person's ability to work and to be self-sufficient, and maximize the opportunity for independence, well-being, and health for people with disabilities. DETD carries out its work according to the values of promoting informed client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

Montanans with disabilities count on DETD and its network of disability service partners to overcome these social and economic challenges. The transition from dependence to independence is a long-term investment that strengthens Montana's diverse communities, not merely the individuals served.

Over the last biennium, DETD expanded engagement with clients and enhanced collaboration with stakeholders to deliver programs and services that allow individuals living with disabilities to be fully integrated into society. 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, and to forge partnerships with the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, local School Districts, Independent Living Centers, Community Rehabilitation Providers, and other local vendors in communities across Montana.

DETD provides services to individuals in every county. The chart on the next page lists the number of citizens benefitting from DETD services in each county.

DETD Individuals Served by County, October 1, 2019 - September 30, 2020



## Summary of Major Functions

DETD consists of five bureaus: 1) Program Operations and Support 2) Vocational Rehabilitation Services 3) Pre-Employment Transition Services 4) Blind and Low Vision Services and 5) Disability Determination Services (DDS). In addition, DETD includes the administratively attached Montana Telecommunications Access program (MTAP) and multiple smaller programs.

## Vocational Rehabilitation

### Montana Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS)

Vocational Rehabilitation Services 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. Our 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 successful employment. Guided by the principle of informed choice, employment goals direct the services that are provided, consistent with an individual's strengths, resources, interests, and capabilities.

The VR Program is an integral part of the state's workforce system and services are delivered in collaboration with local job services, colleges, community rehabilitation providers and numerous other partners.

### Business Services

Staff with Montana Vocational Rehabilitation 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 the workplace, job descriptions, and recruitment and application processes to remove barriers, and provide training and accommodation assistance.

**Arthur was struck by a car resulting in Traumatic Brain Injury and physical impairments. He also struggled with substance abuse issues. Throughout his time with VRBS, Arthur experienced many ups and downs including a few relapses on his recovery. Arthur's passion was to work with and help people, so he chose to pursue an Associate's degree in Human Services from Fort Peck Community College. Due to his disability, he attended part-time and after 4 years and 8 semesters, he earned the degree. Unfortunately, after completing his education, Arthur was unable to immediately find employment and struggled with ongoing health issues. Nonetheless, he remained hopeful and determined to find employment and began a work experience in the college library. He worked hard and even volunteered his time to be there when he didn't have to be. Arthur made himself so indispensable that the college hired him, and he graduated from his employment plan.**

## Extended Employment Program

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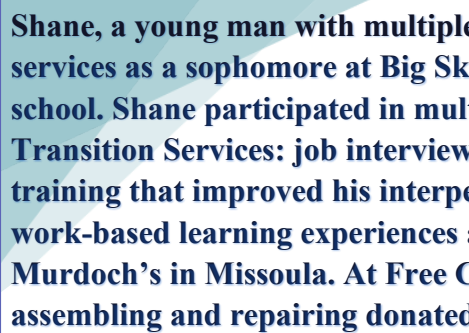
For some consumers receiving Vocational Rehabilitation services, additional support is necessary for them to continue working. Extended Employment offers guidance and follow-up services to help these individuals maintain employment long-term. After being contracted out for more than a decade, management of the Extended Employment program was moved into the division to achieve greater efficiency, internal control, and cost savings. This move is projected to save approximately \$50,000 a year, which will allow the program to support more individuals with significant disabilities maintain employment.

## Pre-Employment Transition Services

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With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), public vocational rehabilitation programs are now required 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 types of services that VR agencies may provide students with disabilities as they transition from school to postsecondary employment and education and expanded the population of students with disabilities the agency serves.

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 assists students with disabilities in identifying career interests. These services are intended to provide students with disabilities the opportunities to practice and improve workplace readiness skills, explore post-secondary training options leading to more industry recognized credentials, and meaningful employment. We provide these services in partnership with local education agencies, community rehabilitation providers, and independent living centers.



**Shane, a young man with multiple disabilities, applied for services as a sophomore at Big Sky High School. While in high school, Shane participated in multiple Pre-Employment Transition Services: job interview skill building, Soft Skills training that improved his interpersonal skills, and paid work-based learning experiences at Free Cycles and Murdoch's in Missoula. At Free Cycles, Shane assisted with assembling and repairing donated bicycles to be sold or gifted to community members in need. Shane picked up on the hands-on tasks extremely quickly and was a huge asset. He then completed another work experience at Murdoch's, where he also worked doing assembly. Shortly after, Shane graduated high school and obtained a seasonal position at Lowe's where he watered plants and assembled products. When the seasonal job ended, there was not a permanent opportunity for an assembler. Shane had become such a valued member of the Lowe's team that they offered him a permanent position as a Loader. VRBS also assisted him with learning Para Transit, which he uses to independently travel to and from work. Shortly after his successful case closure from the VRBS program he earned Employee of the Month.**

## Blind and Low Vision Services

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

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

**Katheryn was referred to OBP due to onset of Macular Degeneration for training on low vision adaptive equipment and orientation and mobility (O&M) skills. As a result, she was able to try out multiple assistive technology devices ultimately obtaining and mastering the following adaptive equipment:**

- **Voice glucose monitor and insulin pen allowing her to independently monitor her blood sugar to keep her diabetes under control**
- **Long white cane with O&M training allowing her to independently navigate the mall, walk herself to a local supermarket, cross streets, and enjoy community events such as going to the farmer's market**
- **OrCam, a portable, artificial vision device that allow visually impaired people to understand text and identify objects through audio feedback, describing what they are unable to see via a camera mounted on a pair of glasses**
- **Pen Friend for her to label items by her voice facilitating access to recipes and medications**

**Katheryn, with additional adaptive mechanisms and tools, has continued to garden, knit, sew and paint as well and reports her life is far from boring!**

### Montana Business Enterprise Program (BEP)

The Business Enterprise Program provides assistance and support to legally blind residents of Montana in securing and operating 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 Business Enterprise Program has vending routes operating in Missoula/Hamilton, Billings and Helena/Boulder/Deer Lodge. Some of the vending machines operated by these vending businesses include: Post Offices in Billings, Helena, and Missoula, Montana Women's Prison, the Capital Building vending machines, Rocky Mountain Labs in Hamilton.



## 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.

**Cody is a young man who was in a car accident that left him paralyzed from the waist down. He called mILp looking for a wheelchair ramp. An Independent Living Specialist visited Cody at his home. He was living in a run-down camper without running water that he would have to pull himself in and out of daily. The Specialist was able to assist Cody with housing applications and today he is living in an accessible apartment. With one on one peer support, the Specialist learned that Cody was a Veteran and encouraged him to apply for benefits at the VA. The Specialist also invited him to participate in mILp's adaptive ice-skating program where he could get out on the ice and enjoy a recreational activity like all Montanans. A simple phone call to mILp opened the door to a variety of services and opportunities that continue to enhance Cody's life today.**

## Other Services

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### Disability Determination Services

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

### Montana Telecommunication Access Program

The Montana Telecommunications Access Programs ensure that Montanans who are Deaf, Deaf/Blind, Hard-of-Hearing, Speech or Mobility impaired can use traditional telecommunications equipment and services. MTAP does this by overseeing 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 equipment 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.

- Mobile devices: devices that enable those who are Deaf or have a speech or mobility challenge to use the telephone by sending messages back and forth, using voice commands, or using video relay services on either a mobile phone or an iPad.

### **MonTECH Assistive Technology Program**

MonTECH provides free information about assistive technology devices and services for Montanans. Assistive technology is any item, piece of equipment, software, or product system used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of persons with disabilities.

### **Public Transportation Coordination**

For all Montanans with disabilities, transportation plays an important role in life. 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. Reliable and accessible transportation is key to a fulfilling that goal. One way Montanans with disabilities meets those needs is through one of the 40 public transit agencies across the state.

The Transportation Coordinator for the Department of Public Health and Human Services serves as a bridge between Montanans with disabilities and their transportation options. The Coordinator's job is to look at all public and private aspects of transportation and assess if they are meeting the needs of traveling Montanans with disabilities. The Coordinator works with agencies within DPHHS and across the state to improve transportation and works with consumers to explain their transportation options.

### **DETD includes three citizen councils, the members of which are appointed by the Governor**

- State Rehabilitation Council
- State Independent Living Council
- Committee on Telecommunications Access Services by Persons with Disabilities



## **Highlights and Accomplishments During the 2019 Biennium**

### **Strategic Planning**

VRBS completed Strategic Planning with more than thirty stakeholders to set goals and guide our work over the next three years. Through the planning process, we redefined our Mission, Vision, and Values and developed a three-year work plan. Our stakeholders identified five goals with supporting objectives:

- Access and Quality
- Youth Engagement
- Equity
- Coordination
- Organizational Stability

You can review the Strategic Plan on our website:

<https://dphhs.mt.gov/detd/vocrehab/mvrpolicyanddocuments>

### **Customized Employment**

VRBS developed and designed a Customized Employment program to serve people with the most significant disabilities who may not have considered competitive integrated employment as an option and may have only explored employment in a sheltered workshop, earning subminimum wages. This program is designed to identify transferrable skills through a discovery process to personalize the relationship between a job seeker and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both parties. With the development of a Customized Employment provider network and community of practice, we are now offering these services statewide to increase opportunities for job seekers and to meet the needs of Montana's workforce.

### **Benefits Counseling**

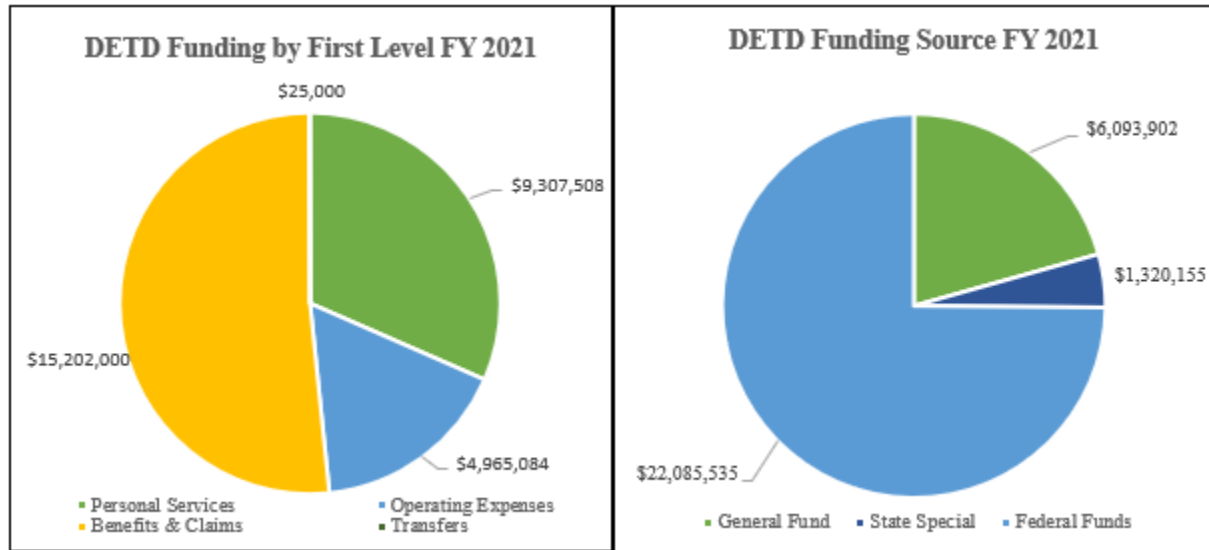
Staff obtained the knowledge and expertise to provide Work Incentive Planning and Assistance to Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities to enable them to have accurate information to make informed choices about work. Benefits counselors can explain how earning a wage will affect federal and state benefits such as Social Security benefits, housing assistance, SNAP, and healthcare benefits including Medicare and Medicaid. The counselors explain how Social Security work incentives can enable a consumer to ease the transition to work without immediately losing all benefits. The delivery of this service has shown to be a promising practice in vocational rehabilitation and has had a demonstrated impact on positive employment outcomes for adults with disabilities.

### **COVID-19 Telework Assistance Grant**

DET administered Telework Assistance Grants, which utilized federal CARES Act funds. This funding went towards purchasing assistive technology equipment to assist Montanans with disabilities obtain and maintain telework opportunities. This assistance ensured people with disabilities have the equipment needed to adapt to the change in working environment due to COVID-19 and to support Montana's workforce. The grant provided adaptive equipment for 89 individuals across 16 counties.

## Funding & FTE Information

<b>Disability Employment Transitions</b>				
FTE	FY 2021 Budget	FY 2022 Request	FY 2023 Request	
	134.07	134.07	134.07	
Personal Services	\$ 9,307,508	\$ 9,482,696	\$ 9,569,794	
Operating Expenses	\$ 4,965,084	\$ 4,963,368	\$ 4,964,008	
Benefits & Claims	\$ 15,202,000	\$ 15,202,000	\$ 15,202,000	
Transfers	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000	
<b>TOTAL COSTS</b>	<b>\$ 29,499,592</b>	<b>\$ 29,673,064</b>	<b>\$ 29,760,802</b>	
	FY 2021 Budget	FY 2022 Request	FY 2023 Request	
General Fund	\$ 6,093,902	\$ 6,042,818	\$ 6,113,229	
State Special	\$ 1,320,155	\$ 1,349,471	\$ 1,349,716	
Federal Funds	\$ 22,085,535	\$ 22,280,775	\$ 22,297,857	
<b>TOTAL FUNDS</b>	<b>\$ 29,499,592</b>	<b>\$ 29,673,064</b>	<b>\$ 29,760,802</b>	



## Change Packages

### Present Law Adjustments:

#### SPWL 1 – Personal Services

The budget includes an increase of \$242,458 total funds in FY 2022 and \$262,286 total funds in FY 2023 to annualize various personal services costs including FY 2021 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 2022</b>	\$16,600	\$29,316	\$196,542	\$242,458
<b>FY 2023</b>	\$19,586	\$29,561	\$213,139	\$262,286
<b>Biennium Total</b>	\$36,186	\$58,877	\$409,681	\$504,744

#### SPWL 3 – Inflation Deflation

The executive requests adjustments to reflect budgetary changes generated from the application of inflation and deflation factors to specific expenditure accounts. Affected accounts include food, postage, gasoline, and others.

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
<b>FY 2022</b>	(\$414)	\$0	(\$1,302)	(\$1,716)
<b>FY 2023</b>	(\$259)	\$0	(\$817)	(\$1,076)
<b>Biennium Total</b>	(\$673)	\$0	(\$2,119)	(\$2,792)

### New Proposals:

#### NP -- 5555 – Reduce GF Budget for State Share Holiday

Governor Gianforte has proposed legislation to impose a two-month state share holiday for employer contributions into the state health insurance fund. This change package removes the general fund portion of the savings generated by the contribution holiday. Savings from other funding sources will remain in the agency to be able to address ongoing functions of the agency. This change package is contingent on passage and approval of the proposed legislation.

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
<b>FY 2022</b>	(\$67,270)	\$0	\$0	(\$67,270)
<b>FY 2023</b>	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Biennium Total</b>	(\$67,270)	\$0	\$0	(\$67,270)