

TO: OVR Customers

FROM: Shannon Austin, M.S., CRC, CWDP, GCDP, OWDS
Executive Director
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

RE: VR Service Provision Continuity During COVID-19

ISSUED: **July 17, 2020**

EFFECTIVE: **Immediately**

As we work together with our partners to address the serious health and safety implications caused by the spread of COVID-19, we want you to know that the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is committed to continuing to serve our customers and provide quality services to Pennsylvanians with disabilities. During these unprecedented times, the health and safety of our customers, providers, staff and communities are our top priority; therefore, we are implementing measures to ensure that we fully cooperate with the guidance on mitigation strategies, including social distancing, issued by federal, state and local authorities.

Under the direction of Governor Tom Wolf, all OVR offices are temporarily closed to the public in response to COVID-19. While in-person meetings with OVR staff are suspended until further notice, OVR staff will continue to provide services by phone, email or utilizing other remote technology during business hours.

Current OVR customers are encouraged to contact their assigned OVR staff person directly by phone or email, or they can call their local OVR office main phone line with any questions or concerns. Although staff are not available to answer the phone, please leave a message as staff are checking voicemail boxes regularly and will get back to you as soon as possible.

OVR remains committed to assisting individuals who make the informed choice to seek a job during the COVID-19 pandemic. At this time, many Pre-Employment Transition Services, college training programs and Supported Employment services are available over the phone or virtually on a computer. However, a few community-based assessment and exploratory services are on hold until mitigation efforts have been lifted. Under the [PA Department of Community and Economic Development Guidelines for Essential Businesses](#), vocational rehabilitation services may still be provided in specific

situations. As a result, some OVR vendors are working to provide services remotely under Governor Wolf's direction for social distancing and universal precautions. In some very specific cases, vendors may still be operating in-person services. If a customer has a question about their case, vendor availability or participating in services during the COVID-19 mitigation process, please contact your OVR counselor directly and they will work with you to coordinate activities or plan for services once the mitigation protocol has been lifted.

Please know that vision rehabilitation therapists, orientation & mobility specialists and staff who work in the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program have been advised to suspend home visits and engage with customers by phone or by use of teleconferencing methods to the degree possible.

Resources

- Regarding SSI/SSDI benefits, effective March 17, 2020, all local Social Security offices are closed to the public for in-person service until further notice. However, SSA is still able to provide critical services which are listed on the [SSA COVID-19 Web Page](#). We encourage you to review this website for all information pertaining to SSA field operations and available services.
- For more information about Pennsylvania's COVID-19 response, please visit the [PA Department of Health's website](#).
- Individuals may also benefit from the guidance recently issued by the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) on steps employers should take related to provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act in response to COVID-19.
- Please visit our [Customer Frequently Asked Question \(FAQ\) page](#) on our website for further information and resources related to COVID-19.

If you have questions or concerns that are not answered here or on our FAQ page, please contact your [local OVR office](#) or email OVR at OVRFeedback@pa.gov.

In closing, I want to thank you for your patience and efforts during this time. I look forward to a time in the near future when we can meet in person to reimagine OVR service delivery to best meet the needs of individuals with disabilities as Pennsylvania and the nation work to rebuild the economy post COVID-19.