

**Arizona Governor's Council
on Blindness and Visual Impairment
Annual Report 2022 - 2023**



Ensuring the Specialized Needs of Blind and Visually
Impaired Arizonans are Addressed Effectively

Supporting and Supported by

Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Business Enterprise Program (BEP)
Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Program

Arizona Department of Economic Security
Your Partner for a Stronger Arizona

GCBVI Council Members

Bob Kresmer, Chair
David Steinmetz, Vice-Chair
Amy Porterfield, Secretary
Ted Chittenden
Donald Porterfield
Bea Shapiro
Nathan Pullen
Mike Gordon
Allan Curry
John McCann
Steve Tepper
Jonathan Pringle
Annette Reichman
Andrew Cohen
Brian Dulude
Kristen Mackey

GCBVI Mission:

“To provide the leadership, advocacy, and guidance that promotes opportunities for Arizonans of all ages who are blind or visually impaired that result in increased dignity, respect and independence

GCBVI Vision

“Create, foster and sustain a climate of opportunity where all Arizonans who are blind or visually impaired are able to direct their own lives and reach their personal chosen goals and objectives”

GCBVI EXECUTIVE ORDER 92-15:(Supersedes Executive Order 86-15)

WHEREAS, blind and visually impaired persons are an integral and growing part of our community; and

WHEREAS, there are many organizations in the public and private sectors which serve the special needs of these Arizonans; and

WHEREAS, various cooperative activities among these organizations have demonstrated a commitment to coordinate their efforts and to eliminate duplication and gaps; and

WHEREAS, establishment of a Governor's Advisory Council has been identified as the most effective approach to accomplishing these goals.

NOW THEREFORE, I, Fife Symington, Governor of the State of Arizona, do hereby create a new Executive Order for the GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON BLINDNESS AND VISUAL IMPAIRMENT and delineate herein its purpose, structure, and function.

PURPOSE. The Governor's Council on Blindness & visual Impairment was established to provide a mechanism to ensure that the specialized needs of blind and visually impaired Arizonans are addressed effectively.

STRUCTURE. The Council shall consist of twenty (20) members appointed by the Governor and shall meet at least once each calendar quarter; the term of office of the members shall be three years.

A. Fourteen (14) of the members shall be consumers (i.e., blind or visually impaired individuals or parents/guardians thereof). Three of the members shall be appointed from the Arizona Council of the Blind; three of the members shall be appointed from the National Federation of the Blind of Arizona; three of the members shall be appointed from the Blinded Veterans Association; one of the members shall be appointed from the Arizona Association of Parents of the Visually Impaired, and four shall be appointed as consumers-at-large.

B. Six of the members shall be representatives of the general community including business, government, employers, and advocates.

C. There shall be four non-voting members who shall serve as ex-officio members. The members shall be:

The manager of Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired in the Department of Economic Security.

The Superintendent of the Arizona State School for the Deaf and Blind.

The Chief Librarian for the Arizona Department of Library, Archives and Public Records, Arizona State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

A representative of a private non-profit agency that provides services to the blind and visually impaired.

D. The Council shall encourage broad participation by other organizations and individuals interested in blind and visually impaired Arizonans to develop and periodically review and recommend goals and objectives to meet the needs of this specialized population. These goals and objectives shall be based on identified needs and shall be designed to cover gaps in existing services.

3. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES. The Council shall:

A. Advise and assist the Governor, the Legislature, and all State agencies providing services to blind individuals, in matters concerning blindness and visual impairment.

B. Submit to the Governor and the Legislature by September 1 of each year, a comprehensive Annual Report on the Council's activities, accomplishments, and recommendations; submit other reports as deemed advisable; conduct periodic statewide conferences to address issues and exchange information.

C. Review and make recommendations, when necessary, on plans and strategies for meeting the needs of blind and visually impaired Arizonans statewide.

D. In cooperation with all related organizations, conduct a comprehensive program of professional and public education to heighten awareness of the capabilities, potentials, and needs of blind and visually impaired persons.

E. Monitor programs and services for blind individuals to encourage efficient and coordinated use of resources in the provision of services.

4. ADMINISTRATION. The Council shall be located within the Office of the Governor. Staff and administrative support shall be provided by the Department of Economic Security.

5. COMPENSATION. The Council members shall receive no compensation but shall be entitled to reimbursement of travel and per diem expense according to State policy.

6. EFFECTIVE DATE. This order shall become effective immediately.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed on the Great Seal of the State of Arizona.

GOVERNOR

DONE at the Capitol in Phoenix this twenty-ninth day of May in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety-two and of the Independence of the United States of America the Two Hundred and Sixteenth.

About EYEKNOWAZ <https://eyeknow.az.gov>

EYEKNOWAZ has been developed as a directory of resources and services for individuals with vision loss or combined hearing and vision loss and for the community. Listings in the directory are categorized by interests and needs to connect users with organizations providing services and information. This directory is not comprehensive, nor do listings imply endorsement or evaluation of programs in any way.

Please send all questions, comments, and suggestions for resources to GCBVI@azdes.gov.

This website is supported by the [Arizona Governor's Council on Blindness & Visual Impairment](#), with assistance from [Arizona Department of Economic Security's Rehabilitation Services Administration](#) and [Arizona Secretary of State](#).



Message from the Chair

Bob Kresmer

The Governor's Council On Blindness and Visual Impairment (GCBVI) remained concerned with the effects of the return to normal workings of the state and private agencies and losses and setbacks resulting from the COVID pandemic. The council engaged in efforts to make the population of blind students, adults, parents of blind and visually impaired children, educators, and seniors aware of the state and county resources for return to normal operations.

Several of the council appointees were reappointed for an additional membership term this year. The GCBVI continues efforts to recruit new members with expertise and experience in many areas of direct relevance to our blind population such as education, employment, training, and advocacy.

The GCBVI monitors and advises state agencies that serve the blind such as the Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and Blind, Arizona Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and the public and private contractors that provide the services that are administered by state agencies.

The Council looks forward to another year of reaching out to blind, DeafBlind, and visually impaired Arizona residents, the Governor and legislators, and the providers of services to these groups.

GCBVI's Advisory Role

- Assures that feedback and advice reflect the views and experiences of people who are blind
- Is a public information and referral source on blindness and deaf blindness
- Fosters client empowerment in the provision of services
- Ensures the policies, practices, services, and marketing activity of the state of Arizona reflect the views and respect the dignity of people who are blind

GCBVI Strategic Direction

- Supporting the highest quality service delivery for blind and deafblind Arizonans
- Cultivating resources for blind and deafblind Arizonans
- Developing effective communication with stakeholders
- Promoting the growth and development of the Council

Client Success Stories



Logan Walker

Logan Walker is a single 36-year-old woman who lost vision in 2019 due to nerve damage resulting from a brain tumor. She said, “It stopped everything I was doing. All I did was sit around and sleep and watch TV.”

Logan enrolled in the Vocational Rehabilitation program and learned about the services offered at the Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ACBVI). When Logan first started her rehabilitation training, she felt that she was where she needed to be. She experienced feelings of hopefulness and confidence and became more like her “Old self.”

While in training, Logan received instruction in Orientation and Mobility, Assistive Technology, Kitchen skills, and Orientation and Adjustment to Disability. Because of this, she travels effectively and safely throughout the community. She functions independently at home, and she is aware of her rights as a woman who is blind.

Logan also participated in two internships: one at Walgreen’s and the other at Terros Health. These experiences have helped her to be acclimated to the world of work and the people with whom she interacts professionally and socially. She also learned valuable social media marketing skills which she uses in her work today.

“I got my life back spiritually, emotionally, and physically,” she says. Logan has learned the value of networking and is now employed as a content manager for a digital marketing agency.

Kathryn Graef

Kathy was 60 years old and living alone when she experienced both vision and hearing loss. Like many people in similar circumstances, Kathy was frustrated by her inability to conduct many daily skills that many of us often take for granted. She contacted ACBVI and was thrilled that we could help her with a variety of services through the Independent Living for the Blind program.

Kathy received training in Orientation and Mobility and how to use a white cane to get information from her environment and detect obstacles. Within a short time, she went from being confined to her home to being able to get out and about in her community. She now uses the local transit system to access shopping, medical appointments, and a community center where she engages in social activities with several of her friends.

Because of the combined loss of vision and hearing, Kathy found many challenges in her daily living. With Vision Rehabilitation Therapy, Kathy has learned how to organize her medications and clothing. She can also safely prepare food for herself and family. Time management and schedule management were also concerns for Kathy. As she cannot hear alarms and timers, she was able to learn how to use adaptive equipment such as a shaker bed to know when her alarm is sounding.

Assistive Technology training was another valuable service for Kathy. She learned how to use a combination of screen readers and screen magnifiers on her computer as well as on her iPhone and tablet. She is now able to access the Internet as well as to send and receive email. She has even learned how to use the magnifier app on her phone to view items around her home when she is not able to see them clearly without the assistance of magnification. Kathy is especially happy with her ability to use Zoom and similar platforms to participate in virtual meetings through her church.

Kathy had some serious challenges associated with her vision and hearing loss. Fortunately, she was able to overcome those challenges through the assistance she received from the ILB program. She now lives a highly active and fulfilling life and is engaged with her family and her community.

Colleen Warner

Colleen is sixty-seven and lives with her husband of 40 years. She was a market research analyst before losing her vision in 2018. She was born with a condition that affected her retinas and her remaining retina detached causing her total vision loss. This affected her life in every way.

Colleen heard about ACBVI from a friend who was helping her to learn how to use technology. She knew she needed to learn more than her friend could teach her, so she came to ACBVI to learn how to adapt to her blindness and learn what she needs to do to improve the quality of her life and function independently.

Since coming to ACBVI, Colleen has received training in Orientation and Adjustment to Disability, Independent Living Services, Orientation and Mobility, and Assistive Technology.

Colleen characterizes herself as someone with a positive outlook. She is grateful for the training she has received as she is able to travel independently, function independently in her home, and use her computer and phone to access the Internet and her email.

Colleen would strongly encourage others experiencing vision loss to find similar ILB-funded services as those she has received from ACBVI. She places great value on finding the support and encouragement from an organization that truly cares about her independence and well-being. She knows that she is not alone and hopes that anyone in a comparable situation can find the same level of hope and support.

Mrs. K

Mrs. K is a 70-year-old woman with macular vision loss due to complications of MS. She called our agency because she needed methods to organize her pantry and closet. At first, we tried Braille, but she did not have enough feeling in her fingertips due to neuropathy, so we went with the pen friend. For her closet I collaborated with her on using the Colorino color identifier to identify the colors of clothing and provided her with closet organizers that she was able to put Pen Friend labels on to make different sections in her closet. For the pantry, we made labels on index cards that she could attach to cans and boxes. Also, she has an iPhone, so she was able to get more comfortable with the apps that read bar codes.

Originally, she was not interested in mail management because she had a desktop magnifier that she bought used, but as we worked together her vision started to change and we realized that she needed optical character recognition (OCR). She learned to use the OrCam. She goes to game nights a couple times a week, so she planned to use the OrCam to read trivia cards. Even for the card games where the OrCam could not read the playing cards, she learned how to use the facial recognition feature on it so she would always know who is at each game table. When I closed her case, she felt that she had become much more independent than when she started collaborating with us.

Mrs. S

Mrs. S is a 79-year-old woman who currently resides with her husband in Cottonwood Arizona. During her initial intake for services, she indicated that she was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa in her late thirties and shared that she is also diabetic. At this time, no additional health difficulties were identified.

During her rehabilitation teaching assessment, Mrs. S indicated that within the year prior to receiving services, she had experienced a meaningful change in vision, and that numerous daily activities were more difficult to complete. First, in the area of communication, she stated that she was having trouble with time management and recordkeeping tasks. Next, in the area of home management, Mrs. S indicated that basic food preparation activities such as pouring, measuring, and identifying food packages had become more problematic. Furthermore, she expressed that she was having difficulty in seeing appliance settings and was interested in learning adaptive methods for using the stove and oven. Lastly, in the area of personal management, Mrs. S stated that tasks such as reading, identifying clothing colors, and most importantly, identifying and organizing medications was a point of stress.

To address her communication goals, Mrs. S was provided instruction in the use of a digital recorder that she could use for tracking information such as appointments, lists, and reminders, and she was also taught how to use a talking keychain watch, as well as other methods for managing appointments such as using her iPhone with its virtual assistant, Siri. Within the area of home management, she was provided training in alternative techniques and devices she can use for pouring cold and hot liquids, measuring wet and dry ingredients, and in the use of nonvisual skills and labeling techniques for identifying and organizing foods. Furthermore, Mrs. S was taught about materials and methods for marking her appliances, and also in the use of adaptive techniques for centering pans, regulating heat, and the overall use of her other senses when cooking.

In the area of personal management, Mrs. S was provided with instruction in adaptive techniques and devices she can use for organizing and dispensing medications including the use of audio labeling and the use of trays and medicine boxes for organizing them. She was also provided with several resources for further assistance such as Accessible Pharmacy and Script Talk. To address her ability to read and organize paperwork and other household items, she was provided training in the use of an optical character recognition device, which translates type written print into speech. Finally, Mrs. S was provided guidance in

techniques she could use for marking and organizing clothing, including identifying clothing by fabric texture, using a talking color identifier, and creating audio labels for clothing sections in her closet.

As a result of receiving services, Mrs. S indicated that she feels increased confidence and greater independence. She states she feels more comfortable in her ability to prepare foods, and she does not worry about how to manage Her and her husband's medications. Beyond her ability to complete specific daily activities with greater ease, Mrs. S indicated that she has experienced life changes as a result of her boost of confidence. She has begun a daily walking and exercise routine and will be attending an orientation and mobility immersion program for a week at the end of August.

Arizona Talking Book Library

The past year was notable for exciting enhancements in braille materials and services. In August 2022, Arizona was approved to distribute the NLS Braille eReader produced by HumanWare. Using the portable refreshable braille display, patrons can download braille books directly from the Braille and Audio Reading (BARD) website. 148 devices have been circulated through June 30, 2023.

The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) also launched the Braille-on-Demand program, which enables readers to request and receive hard-copy braille books to keep for their personal use. During the year, forty-seven books have been delivered to Arizona residents, which include mystery novels, cookbooks, and special materials from the NLS Music Section.

Library staff participated in NFB-NEWSLINE® online training in April 2023. This free audio and braille news service is made available through an agreement between the Arizona Department of Economic Security and the Arizona State Library, Archives, and Public Records. The training was an opportunity for new employees to receive an introduction to the service and for everyone to find out more about NFB-NEWSLINE® updates. It covered eligibility, access methods, and content options that are available to subscribers. During the year there were more than 1500 subscribers that placed over 26,000 calls and accessed content electronically over 500,000 times.

A Reader Advisor has resumed a monthly book talk program at the Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired which was paused during the pandemic. The library also continued to offer a monthly book discussion by phone or computer and a Summer Reading Program for youth and adults.

Erin Pawlus

Director, Arizona State Talking Book Library

Committee Reports

Assistive Technology Committee

The AT Committee has been participating in providing the Assistive Technology in the Desert podcasts, in partnership with Sun Sounds of Arizona. The podcasts have been going well, although the committee would like to identify methods for creating better audio quality for the podcast recordings. The AT Committee, unfortunately, did not participate in this year's VRATE Conference.

Committee Members

Beatriz Shapiro, Chair
Sue LeHew
Bob Kresmer
Nathan Pullen
Mark Nelson
Karla Rivas-Parker

Education Committee

The Education Committee of the GCBVI was very engaged in the situation that public and charter schools, colleges and universities, and their administrators confronted because of the pandemic.

We are looking forward to the 2022-2023 school year and of returning to face-to-face education.

Committee Members

Bob Kresmer, Chair
Lisa Yencarelli
Ed House
Jared Kittelson
Doris Woltman
Julie Urban

Employment Committee

The GCBVI Strategic Plan gives the Employment Committee many goals on which it must take the lead. These goals include the following:

- BEP remains stable, protected by legislation, and continues to create opportunities for blind VR consumers.
- Implementation of an ongoing employer education campaign.
- Implementation of best practices for AIB and community partners using GCBVI and blindness stakeholders
- Supporting the E75 initiative to recognize and encourage employment of blind and visually impaired individuals

Committee Members

Nathan Pullen, Chair
Terell Welch
Bea Shapiro
David Steinmetz
Reggie Laister
Jonathan Pringle

DeafBlind Issues Committee

The DeafBlind Issues Committee was re-established with fresh faces, hands, and voices. The first few meetings were focused on the growth of DeafBlind community and onboarding appropriate stakeholders and representatives. In parallel to the growth, a check was made on the progress regarding the three goals assigned to the committee. Those goals are the following:

- ILB (Independent Living Blind) Services to all populations are universally available statewide.
- SSP (Support Service Providers) services to DeafBlind Arizonans are sustained across the state.
- Best practices are established and implemented for ILB consumers who are DeafBlind.

SSP services have been growing at a steady pace in Phoenix and Tucson and more SSPs are needed to meet the higher demand which is an excellent problem. Awareness regarding ILB services continues to be advertised and promoted across various communities in Arizona. Best practices for the DeafBlind population are evolving on a constant basis. The committee will formulate new goals for the committee to focus on in 2024.

Committee Members:

Andrew Cohen
Jonathan Pringle
Megan Mogan
Sue Kay Kneifel
Virginia Thompson

Independent Living Committee

The GCBVI Strategic Plan gives the Independent Living Committee many goals on which it must take the lead. These goals include the following:

- Independent Living Blind (ILB) funding is increased and services to older blind consumers are stable and sustained.
- Under 55 ILB funding is established and sustained.
- ILB services to all populations are universally available statewide.
- ILB best practices are established for SBVID ILB unit with GCBVI and blindness stakeholders.
- Best practices are established and implemented for ILB consumers who are deafblind.

Committee Members

Ted Chittenden, Chair
Brian Dulude
Katie Gomez
John McCann
Steve Tepper
Frank Vance
George Martinez

Public Information Committee

The GCBVI Strategic Plan gives the Legislative and Public Information Committee many goals on which it must take the lead. These goals include the following:

- Implementation of an ongoing employer education campaign.
- Public service agencies receive regular feedback regarding accessibility.
- GCBVI is recognized as an information and referral resource for both consumers and agencies and businesses that serve blind consumers.

- Public awareness of the GCBVI is raised and positive outcomes are common knowledge.
- EyeKnowAZ includes an accessibility resource page.

Committee Members

David Steinmetz, Chair
Ted Chittenden
Erin Pawlus

Legislative and Public Policy Committee

The GCBVI Strategic Plan gives the Legislative and Public Policy Committee many goals on which it must take the lead. These goals include the following:

- Ensuring that funding for VR services is available through all possible methods.
- Making sure that all blind Arizonans who want them are receiving VR services and that the comprehensive blindness skills training programs are available to all blind consumers.
- Revising SBVID best practices with collaboration from the GCBVI and other blind stakeholders.
- Ensuring that funding for independent living training for blind and visually impaired seniors is both increased and sustained.
- Establishing and maintaining funding for independent living training for blind and visually impaired persons under the age of fifty-five who are not necessarily looking to return to the workforce.

Committee Members:

Amy Porterfield, Chair
Donald Porterfield
Bob Kresmer
Ted Chittenden
John McCann
Ed House
Jonathan Pringle