

**Arizona Governor's Council  
on Blindness and Visual Impairment  
Annual Report 2023 - 2024**



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  
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. Here 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](mailto: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 Council (GCBVI) engaged in efforts to make this population of blind students, adults, parents of BVI children, educators, and seniors aware of the state and county resources, and the regulations and policies that would affect their daily lives.

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 the blind and visually impaired Arizona residents, the Governor and legislators, and the providers of specialized services.

## **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**

### **Ms. M**

Mrs. M is an almost 70-year-old woman who is almost totally blind due to macular degeneration. When she first called, she did not know what she wanted other than to read her own mail. After doing a low vision assessment it was determined that she would benefit from an OCR device instead of a magnifier. After learning to use the smart reader she is using it all the time. When we first started working with Mrs. M reported that she was only making herself bowls of cereal for meals and making a mess by pouring the milk in the bowls. We worked extensively on safety techniques in the kitchen and provided her with some devices like a George Foreman grill and electric skillet. Also using the stovetop and cutting and slicing safely. She made fried chicken in the electric skillet for the first time since she lost her vision. We also worked on methods for identifying her medications and using talking clocks and watches. She is also receiving AT training for using her iPhone with Voice Over and she is waiting for mobility training. She feels like her life has improved significantly since she received training.



## **Committee Reports**

### **Assistive Technology Committee**

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

- Accessibilities standards are developed and implemented for instruction and testing for infants and toddlers through post-secondary education.
- Best practices are developed and implemented and available for all Arizona school districts to administer expanded core curriculum education.
- Develop and implement collaborative data collection mechanisms to track test scores K-12 for all school districts in Arizona.

### **Committee Members**

Beatriz Shapiro, Chair

Sue LeHew

Bob Kresmer

Nathan Pullen

Karla Rivas-Parker

Jeff Bishop

### **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 is 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

## **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.

The Education Committee convened information gathering virtual meetings and disseminated the information to the decision makers, students, parents, and teachers of blind and visually impaired students.

We are looking forward to the 2024-2025 school year and face-to-face education.

## **Committee Members**

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

## **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 mentoring program pairing successfully closed VR consumers with new VR consumers.
- Implementation of best practices for AIB and community partners using GCBVI and blindness stakeholders

## **Committee Members**

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

## **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 55 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

### **DeafBlind Issues Committee**

The DeafBlind Issues Committee continues to focus on the three goals assigned to the committee:

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

### **Committee Members:**

Jonathan Pringle  
Larry Rhodes  
Megan Mogan  
Sue Kay Kneifel  
Virginia Thompson