

Planning for Disability and Elderly Benefit Specialists

Disability Benefit Specialist (DBS) and Elderly Benefit Specialist (EBS) positions provide assistance with government benefits and advocacy at no charge to the public. Benefit Specialists assist people to access the benefits they are eligible to receive and to remain as financially independent as possible. Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) are the designated location for DBS service delivery as well as a location to headquarter the EBS position for these locally provided services. The following are considerations regarding these positions when planning an ADRC.

Populations Served

Disability Benefit Specialists work with adults aged 18 to 59 with developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, and/or mental illness. Elderly Benefit Specialists work with adults age 60 and over. In addition, there are tribal Elderly Benefit Specialists serving Wisconsin tribal members.

DBS/EBS Relationships

The DBS and EBS programs work together to provide benefit program information and counseling to the public and may rely on each other's strengths in knowledge of specific programs. They may also collaborate to provide services to clients who are between 55 and 65 years old, who may have questions about retirement benefits and disability benefits. DBS and EBS positions may be employees of the ADRC directly, or of another private or public agency. A memorandum of understanding, contract, or other similar agreement must be in place between the ADRC and any outside agency employing DBS and EBS positions.

Location of Staff

Regardless of who employs the benefit specialists, they should be located at the ADRC to the extent space permits, to support the mission of a one-stop source of information and advocacy. These positions should be able to travel at times and to places that accommodates individuals looking for assistance who are unable to visit the ADRC or other office. For example, benefit specialists may have hours at a library, senior center, or drop-in center for people with mental illness, as well as meeting with people in their homes.

Staff Training

DBS and EBS positions will need to attend and successfully complete initial and ongoing training as required by the Department of Health and Family Services. DBS positions in Wisconsin rely on the professional guidance of DBS program attorneys at Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW). Training of the EBS is provided through three public interest elder law agencies: the Elder Law Center of the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups, Senior Law of Legal Action of Wisconsin, and Judicare, for tribal benefit specialists.

Confidentiality

DBS and EBS positions operate under a high standard of confidentiality, and require access to private office space and a secure place to store their sensitive or privileged documentation. EBS positions establish individual agreements with consumers to provide services. Through these agreements consumers may limit the sharing of their information with the other ADRC staff, including EBS direct supervisors.

Supervision

Please refer to each program's Policies and Procedures regarding the supervision of the benefit specialists.

Other considerations and resources in planning for Disability and Elderly Benefit Specialists positions in an ADRC are also available. For DBS information, contact Holly Laux O'Higgins at lauxhm@dhfs.state.wi.us or call (608) 266-8905. For EBS information, contact Glenn Silverberg at silvegj@dhfs.state.wi.us or call (608) 267-3201. For general ADRC questions please send an email request to RCteam@dhfs.state.wi.us or call Donna McDowell (608) 266-3840 for further information.