

§ 143-545.1. Purpose, establishment and administration of program; services.

(a) Policy. – Recognizing that disability is a natural part of human experience, the State establishes as its policy that individuals with physical and mental disabilities should be able to participate to the maximum extent of their abilities in the economic, educational, cultural, social, and political activities available to all citizens of the State. To implement this policy, the Department of Health and Human Services shall establish and operate comprehensive and accountable programs of vocational rehabilitation and independent living for persons with disabilities. These programs are to be administered by the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities in collaboration with the Division of Services for the Blind, which conducts vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs for individuals who are blind or visually impaired, pursuant to Chapter 111 of the General Statutes and the rules of the Commission for the Blind adopted pursuant to G.S. 143B-157. The programs so provided shall be administered according to the following principles:

- (1) The opportunity and ability to work and to live independently are important activities that enhance not only the lives of individuals with disabilities but also the greater society in which they live. These activities fulfill the need to be productive, promote self-esteem, and allow for participation in the full array of activities of daily living;
- (2) Eligible individuals with disabilities shall be provided individualized training, independent living services, and educational and support services that prepare them for independent living and competitive employment opportunities in integrated settings with reasonable accommodations;
- (3) Individuals with disabilities shall be active participants in their own vocational rehabilitation/independent living programs and shall be involved in making meaningful and informed choices about vocational/independent living goals and objectives and the related services they receive; and
- (4) As full partners in their vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs, participants in the programs shall provide information required by the Department to determine eligibility and the nature of their disabilities, shall use other resources that are available to assist in their programs, and shall assume joint responsibility with departmental staff for planning and implementing their programs.

(b) Services: –

- (1) Vocational rehabilitation and independent living services provided by the Department shall address comprehensively the needs of each individual to the maximum extent possible within available resources. These services shall contain labor force development and training components and services that enhance the independence and full participation of citizens with disabilities in community life. Specific services shall include assessment services to determine eligibility and rehabilitation needs; counseling, guidance, and referral services; physical and mental restoration services; reader services; vocational and other training services; job development and job placement services; interpreter services; on-the-job or other related personal assistance services including attendant care services; mobility and rehabilitation technology services; training services necessary for living in the community; and supported employment services.
- (2) The Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services shall adopt rules to establish eligibility for services, the nature and scope of services to be provided, standards for community rehabilitation programs and qualified personnel to provide services and conditions, criteria, and procedures under

which services may be provided including financial need for services. Rules governing financial need for services shall meet the requirements set in federal law and regulations.

- (3) The Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services or, when appropriate, the Commission for the Blind, shall establish by rule a formula for a schedule of rates and fees to be paid by clients and other third party purchasers for services.
 - (4) The Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services or, when appropriate, the Commission for the Blind, shall establish formal appeals procedures that are consistent with those required by federal regulations so that any applicant for or client of vocational rehabilitation or independent living services who is dissatisfied with any determinations made by rehabilitation counselors or coordinators concerning the furnishing or denial of services may request a timely review of those determinations. The appeal procedures shall be the same regardless of whether federal funds are included in the particular services.
- (c) [Limitation On Service Reduction. –] The Department of Health and Human Services shall not enact policy that reduces or eliminates services provided at Adult Developmental and Vocational Programs (ADVP) or Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP) without (i) fully following procedures regarding stakeholder notification and input and (ii) appropriately funding a robust array of services that reflect choice. The Department of Health and Human Services shall not permit a reduction in admission to ADVPs and CRPs until current services are appropriately reviewed and any new services are approved through statutory or regulatory processes. (1995, c. 403, s. 1(b); 1997-443, s. 11A.118(a); 1997-456, s. 27; 1999-161, s. 1; 2023-65, s. 8.5; 2023-115, ss. 1, 2.)