

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services  
600 East Boulevard Avenue, Bismarck ND 58505**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 23, 2014**

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## **Rehabilitation Therapists Help People Live Independently** *N.D. Celebrates Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Week June 22-28*

BISMARCK, ND. – Underlying medical conditions, age-related changes in vision, and injuries cause people to lose their vision. Each year, specially trained vision rehabilitation therapists in North Dakota help over 1,000 people affected by blindness or significant vision loss to continue living independently in communities across the state.

The N.D. Department of Human Services' Division of Vocation Rehabilitation and the N.D. Vision Services/School for the Blind want to remind state residents during Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Week, June 22–28, that experts and services are available. The two agencies together employ nine vision rehabilitation specialists – a profession that grew out of the work of “home teachers” such as Anne Sullivan, the teacher and advocate who worked with Helen Keller.

The seven therapists employed by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation work with people age 55 and older who have serious vision loss or blindness. They provide services, equipment, and training to help people read mail, medication labels, recipes, and other materials. They teach people adaptive ways to prepare meals, do laundry, identify money, use the phone, handle writing tasks, complete work tasks, identify safe routes to exit a home in an emergency, and travel safely at home or in their communities. Vision rehabilitation therapists also help people determine what equipment can assist them with everyday tasks. Their efforts enabled over 950 North Dakotans to maintain a high level of independence last year.

The two N.D. Vision Services/School for the Blind therapists provided similar services to 206 younger adults during the 2011-2013 biennium.

N.D. Department of Human Services' Older Blind Program services are provided at no cost to qualifying individuals and include the assessment and training services provided by department vision therapists, and initial equipment purchase costs.

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Individuals with a serious vision loss affecting their independence or job can access vision rehabilitation therapy services and vocational rehabilitation services by contacting Vision Services and Independent Living Program Administrator Helen Baumgartner at 701-328-8950, toll free 1-800-755-2745, ND Relay TTY at 1-800-366-6888, or [hbaumgartner@nd.gov](mailto:hbaumgartner@nd.gov). She will direct people to the agency and program that best meets their needs.

Information about N.D. Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation services for individuals, including Older Blind Program Services, is online at <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr/index.html>. North Dakota Vision Services/School for the Blind information is on the Web at <http://www.ndvisionservices.com/>.

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