



A Crisis Facing Seniors Losing Vision

As the baby boomer generation ages, more and more seniors are losing vision. As most of them are no longer working, they are not eligible to receive vocational rehabilitation services from the New York State Commission for the Blind. As a result, they do not have the tools blind people rely on every day, such as Braille or large print, accessible technology, and the use of a long white cane or guide dog.

Vision rehabilitation is essential to maximizing the independence, participation, safety, and overall quality of life that people expect as they age. Yet, for seniors losing vision, there are numerous barriers to the high-quality and universally accessible vision rehabilitation services others can access. Vision loss creates the need for adjustments in many daily activities, such as writing a check, telling time, looking for items, using a phone, managing medications, and preparing a meal. Without rehabilitation training, getting around, the ability to read print, and driving become more difficult and put them at increased risk of falls, injury, and mortality.

Lack of funding for rehabilitation services for seniors facing vision loss remains a formidable barrier to accessing such services. The Commission currently receives a small amount of funding for non-vocational rehabilitation services for seniors, but it is far from sufficient! Accordingly, most seniors losing vision do not learn how to prepare meals independently, shop, use public transportation, use accessible technology, or manage their finances. The tragic result is that many end up in nursing homes, at state expense.

An annual appropriation of an additional \$5 million to the Commission for the Blind, specifically for non-vocational rehabilitation services to blind seniors, would certainly improve access to rehabilitation and help to ameliorate this crisis, and will save the State money by keeping people out of nursing homes who do not need to be there.