

# Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission 2019 Annual Year End Report



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### Vision/Mission:

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) promotes equality, empowerment and independence of individuals with disabilities. These goals are achieved through enhancing and encouraging personal choice and the right to succeed or fail in the pursuit of independence and employment in the community.

## Message from Commissioner Toni Wolf

**2019** has been an exciting time for the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC). Our work to support individuals with disabilities in the Commonwealth to be self-sufficient continues through the tireless efforts of our 852 member workforce. Within the Commonwealth, more than 800,000 people live with disabilities. Throughout the pages of this report, you will learn about the unique and specialized role MRC plays in their lives.

MRC embarked on a range of forward thinking initiatives as part of our efforts to build “the MRC of the future.” The foundation of this work is built on findings from an agency-wide business process redesign, during which our internal and external stakeholders shaped and advised our priorities for the coming years. There was significant progress toward these priorities, such as incorporating consumer voice into our service design and delivery, expanding partnerships with sister agencies, and decreasing roadblocks to accessing critical MRC services, during the 2019 fiscal year. Highlights include:

- **Creation of an Office of Engagement.** This new office reports directly to the Commissioner and ensures that the voice of consumers we serve, and their family members, are front and center in all parts of our work, from program design, to evaluation of existing services, to development of new initiatives. This office functions in partnership with many of our existing consumer advisory bodies, including the State Rehabilitation Council.
- **Development of a streamlined pathway to MRC.** We have prioritized decreasing the burden on consumers to access our services, and creating an improved experience for those we serve. During Fiscal Year 2019, we piloted the use of a dedicated unit to determine eligibility for our vocational rehabilitation services. We are in the process of identifying lessons learned and best practices to move towards an integrated intake and eligibility process for our vocational rehabilitation and community living divisions. Our goal is to have a consistent and welcoming front door to MRC services.
- **Creation of a Provider Advisory Council.** This new council brings together community provider

representatives from across MRC programs to meet quarterly with the Commissioner and agency leadership to ensure consistent communication and to foster stronger provider relationships.

- **Strengthened partnerships with EHS agencies.** Over this past year, we strengthened relationships with EHS agencies including, but not limited to, the Department of Transitional Assistance, the Department of Developmental Disabilities, the Department of Mental Health, and the Department of Public Health. With these partnerships, we have developed and/or launched enhanced, integrated services for the consumers we serve, resulting in more targeted resources to support individuals living with disabilities in their pursuit of work and living self-sufficiently in the community.
- **Alignment of agency structure with EHS best practices.** Finally, we closely examined the structure of our agency and identified key gaps and needs, as well as opportunities to strengthen our foundation. Building on the organizational design best practices of our sister agencies, we released a new agency organizational structure that better reflects our commitment to fiscal agility, as well as the value of data in informing decision-making across the organization.

We are grateful to Governor Charlie Baker, Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders, and members of the Massachusetts Legislature for their unwavering support of MRC. This was demonstrated by an \$8.5 million increase in our state funding, strengthening our ability to provide quality services. Quality services at MRC means that one size does not fit all. MRC is committed to a person-centered approach that both understands challenges and embraces opportunities. New policies, rethinking structures, and shifting agency culture remain as evolving factors as we prepare MRC for the new decade. I am grateful to our forward thinking workforce, our sister agencies, our providers, and our employer partners. I am also indebted to each and every consumer who reminds us that solution thinking drives change and enables transformation. It is an honor to sit alongside each of you to conduct this important work while celebrating our victories this year.



## MRC at a Glance

\*Statistics below are shown for the previous fiscal year.

### Vocational Rehabilitation Program (ages 14+)

State Fiscal Year:	2017	2018	2019
Consumers Actively Receiving Services	27,028	29,463	24,991
Consumers Enrolled in Training/Education Programs	17,685	18,471	13,174
Consumers Employed	3,973	4,053	3,695

### Youth and Young Adults Receiving Services from Vocational Rehabilitation (ages 14-22)

State Fiscal Year:	2017	2018	2019
Youth/Young Adults Actively Receiving Services	n/a	11,057	10,374
Youth/Young Adults Employed	n/a	1,060	1,050
Youth/Young Adults Enrolled in Training/Education Programs	n/a	5,588	7,992

### Community Living Programs

State Fiscal Year:	2017	2018	2019
Total Consumers Actively Receiving Services	14,284	15,054	15,148
Total Funds Expended	\$50,116,672	\$48,186,551	\$53,541,561
Average Cost per Consumer Served	\$3,509	\$3,201	\$3,535

### Disability Determination Services\*

Federal Fiscal Year:	2017	2018	2019
Total Budget	\$47,645,563	\$47,765,219	\$46,971,951
Cost per Case	\$571.63	\$568.79	\$613.05
Accuracy of Initial Decisions	96.2%	96.4%	96.9%
Federal Accuracy of Decision Standard	96.2%	96.4%	90.6%

*\*Disability Determination runs on a federal fiscal year.*

## Vocational Rehabilitation Division

### Overview

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) division of MRC assists individuals with disabilities in preparing for and obtaining jobs across the state. Vocational rehabilitation assists people with physical, cognitive, intellectual, and/or mental health conditions to manage the modern workplace.

Through partnerships with public colleges, universities, and training programs, and strategic partnerships with statewide and local employers, VR consumers have opportunities to explore and train for careers in various sectors. Our dual customer approach – that is supporting both the VR consumer and the employer – through events such as Job Driven Trainings, Hiring Events, Internships, and On the Job Trainings have proven effective strategies for achieving employment outcomes. Salaries for successfully employed consumers range from minimum wage to over \$120,000 annually.

Vocational Rehabilitation services include:

- Vocational counseling, guidance, and assistance in job placement,
- Training programs including job-driven partnerships with employers, and college and vocational certificate programs,
- Assistive technology and rehabilitation technology services,
- Job Coach services,
- Community-based employment services,
- Interview preparation and direct job placement services,
- Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for students with disabilities.

### Return on Investment

- \$14-\$18 for each \$1 invested by MRC Vocational Rehabilitation in returns to society based on increased lifetime earnings.
- \$5 returned to the government through income taxes and reduced public assistance payments for every \$1 invested in the MRC Vocational Rehabilitation program.

### Innovation

In 2019, the Vocational Rehabilitation division developed and/or launched new initiatives to ensure all

consumers had access to needed employment support services, to leverage resources with sister EHS agencies, and to continue to examine barriers to accessing MRC services. Highlights include:

- **MRC/Department of Mental Health Employment Initiative:** A formalized partnership with the Department of Mental Health, launched in July 2019, which employs up to 18 specialized mental health vocational rehabilitation counselors to served DMH Adult Clinical and Community Services job seekers.
- **MRC/Department of Transitional Assistance Empower to Employ Initiative:** A jointly-funded partnership focused on engagement and co-case management to provide individualized and meaningful services leading to sustained employment, economic independence, and family stability for DTA clients with disabilities.
- **Eligibility Pilot:** A six month pilot in Western Massachusetts to explore strategies to streamline the eligibility process, and decrease time from eligibility to service delivery.

### Consumer Demographics

Psychiatric Disabilities	41.9%
Learning Disabilities	26.5%
Orthopedic Disabilities	8.1%
Substance Use Disorder	7.2%
Deaf and Hard of Hearing	5.7%
Neurological Disabilities	2.2%
Developmental Disabilities	2.0%
Traumatic Brain Injury	1.6%
Average Age	31.0
Female	45.0%
Male	55.0%
Caucasian	79.5%
African American/Black	17.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3.6%
American Indian	1.3%
Hispanic/Latino	13.6%

## Students (Ages 14-22) and Young Adults (Ages 14-24) Services

Within the overall Vocational Rehabilitation program, 10,374 youth and young adults ages 14 to 24 were served during SFY19. Of these, 1,050 young consumers were placed in employment, with an average hourly wage of \$13.07. Employed young consumers worked an average of 26.7 hours per week.

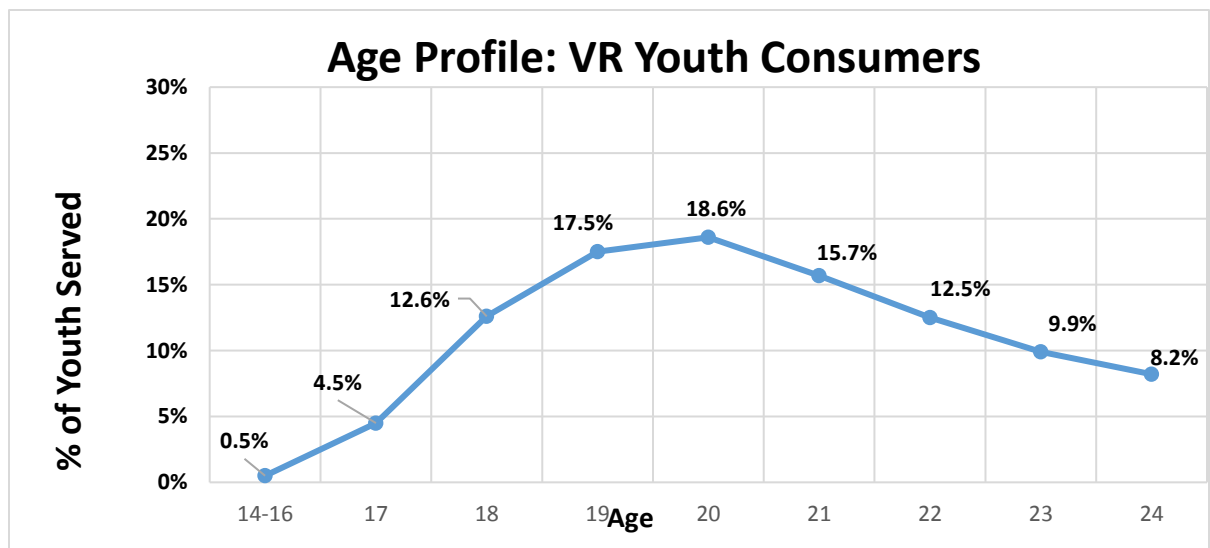
During SFY2019, MRC served 238 students through its Transition Pathway Services demonstration grant program. This project provides a coordinated model of services including work-based learning experiences and other employment related skills and supports to facilitate future post-secondary enrollment and employment opportunities.

### Innovation

- **New Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) model:** In July 2019 MRC Vocational Rehabilitation launched a new Pre-ETS model, to provide a “light touch” for students with disabilities who may not need to apply for MRC Vocational Rehabilitation services, but could benefit from exposure to

employment and career development supports. These programs emphasize awareness, exploration, and preparation, and offer work-based learning experiences, job readiness and skills trainings, assistance with enrollment in post-secondary education and training programs, job exploration, and leadership/mentoring services to students with disabilities. To date 946 students have been served through Pre-ETS in partnership with 34 providers across the Commonwealth.

- **Transition Pathways Services Demonstration Grant:** MRC is mid-way through a five year, federally funded demonstration grant to provide a coordinated model of services including work-based learning experiences and other employment related skills and supports to facilitate future post-secondary enrollment and employment opportunities in three communities (Lawrence, Springfield, Roxbury) in Massachusetts.



# Community Living Division

## Overview

The MRC Community Living Division comprises a variety of programs, supports, and services that address the diverse needs of adults and transition-age youth and young adults with disabilities to support community integration, and participate fully in the community.

Community Living Services include:

- Independent Living Centers
- Turning 22 Youth Transition to Adult Human Services
- Supported Living
- Home Care Assistance Program
- Accessible Housing Registry
- Assistive Technology Training and Devices
- MassMATCH
- Community-Based Residential, Day and Support Services for Persons with Brain Injuries

## Independent Living Centers

MRC provides funding and oversight (as the Designated State Entity) to the Commonwealth's 10 Independent Living Centers (ILCs). As consumer-directed organizations, each ILC provides peer counseling, skills training, advocacy, and information and referral, and assists individuals with disabilities in transitioning to independence. In addition, ILCs offer targeted services to Vocational Rehabilitation consumers, including youth and young adults, to support achievement of employment goals. Other services offered by ILCs include Personal Care Management and Long-Term Services and Support coordination under recent state Medicaid reform initiatives. The ILCs serve as a strong consumer voice on a wide range of local, state, and national issues.

## Transition to Adulthood

Each of the ILCs provide Transition to Adulthood programs (TAP) to young people with disabilities ages 14 to 22 who are enrolled in special education. TAP offer individual and group activities to help students with disabilities learn skills and self-confidence to prepare for independence in adulthood. TAP-enrolled students work with adult peer mentors who help the student learn how to take on the responsibilities of living independently in the community. Examples of training include money management, learning to use

public transportation, self-advocacy, and classes to obtain a learner's permit. ILCs collectively served over 670 youth through TAP in FY19.

## Young Adult and Adult Supported Living

The Supported Living Program assists youth and adults age 16 and up with severe physical disabilities to live independently in the community. The program supports individuals in managing their daily affairs, such as managing Personal Care Attendants, paying bills and money management, finding or maintaining housing, coordinating health services, and/or obtaining and maintaining durable medical equipment. Participants make their own decisions and direct their supports, and program staff help the individual carry out their wishes.

## Home Care Assistance Program

The Home Care Assistance Program provides assistance to people with disabilities needing in-home supports that include housecleaning, laundry, meal preparation, grocery shopping, and medication pick-up. These essential services enable those with disabilities, with no other means of completing these tasks, to continue to live independently, and maintain hygiene and nutrition, which supports overall health, and the ability to be active participants in their communities.

## Assistive Technology Training and Devices

This program provides assistive technology (AT) devices and services to assist people with significant disabilities to live independently. By using assistive technology, a person with a disability can control their environment, communicate with other people more easily, or carry out personal tasks such as paying bills or shopping. Services are usually provided in the individual's home. The program provides equipment, sets it up, teaches each individual how to use their AT, and provides follow-up support or technical assistance as needed.

## MassMATCH

MRC is the designated state host for the federal AT Act program - MassMATCH (Massachusetts' initiative to Maximize Assistive Technology in Consumer's Hands) - which offers a range of activities to help people learn about and acquire AT. MassMATCH program staff provide training and technical assistance to help organizations evaluate their equipment needs, develop policies or programs related to assistive technology, and train staff on the use or applications of assistive technology.



## Community Based Services

Community Based Services works with individuals living in their own homes or in small residential programs. We support people in rebuilding their lives after experiencing a disability. Many of the individuals we support have brain injuries; most have more than one significant disability. Our two programs are the Statewide Head Injury Program and the Acquired Brain Injury/Moving Forward Program.

Supports include:

- Providing individuals a range of services and resources to move into and live in the community,
- Support for families and caregivers,
- Home modifications to assist individuals to live safely in their homes,
- Person-centered planning to ensure that every individual has the services that best support their needs,
- Training for other state agencies, private non-profit agencies, families and consumers,
- Developing resources and trainings specific to the brain injury and substance use disorder communities to support professionals in their work with individuals living with both brain injury and substance use.

## Innovation

- **“Bridges Between” federal grant award:**  
MRC has developed a partnership with the Department of Public Health, the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts and other community partners to build connections to support individuals who both have a Traumatic Brain Injury and Substance Use Disorder. This program provides targeted training to community service providers throughout the Commonwealth.
- **MRC's Supported Living Program Eligibility Pilot:**  
This pilot expands eligibility on a short term basis to serve individuals who do not meet the current eligibility criteria of living with a severe physical disability. This pilot provides ongoing case coordination to individuals who need assistance to live independently.

### How many people do we support?\*

Independent Living Centers	5,769
Assistive Technology	2,924
Home Care Services	1,165
Brain Injury Services	1,260
Community Based Services	1,005
Turning 22 Services	927
Housing Registry	1,477
Supported Living Services	169

*\*Consumers may receive supports from multiple programs*

### Total Dollars Spent on Services\*

Brain Injury Services	\$32,935,969
Independent Living Centers	\$8,926,545
Home Care Services	\$4,345,720
Assistive Technology	\$2,573,805
Independent Living Turning 22 Services	\$1,996,436
Supported Living Services	\$1,545,261
Housing Registry	\$80,000
Community Based Services*	\$1,040,000

*\*Community Based Services receives funding from an Interagency Service Agreement with MassHealth*

## Disability Determination Services Division

### Overview

The MRC Disability Determination Services (DDS) is funded by the federal Social Security Administration (SSA) and determines the initial and continued eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits.

Providing benefits to Massachusetts residents who are disabled and unable to work improves individuals' income stability, which allows greater independence and quality of life for those served. Favorable decisions also provide access to Medicaid and Medicare coverage, which opens the opportunity to health care for those who are disabled.

We were able to approve emergency payments in 35% of the SSI claims we processed in cases that had a high likelihood of approval but current evidence was not sufficient to satisfy programmatic rules. These emergency benefits provide income while we work to gather the full evidence. This was accomplished while maintaining a quality rating of 96.9%, well above the national standard of 90.6%.

### Innovation

During FY2020, we are anticipating a major software upgrade in our case processing system. This is a national SSA initiative to have all state agencies that process disability claims for SSA use the same system. Once completed, this project will save taxpayer dollars and allow workloads to be matched with resources when needed to overcome significant backlogs in claims. At the same time, we will balance our own resources to meet the workload and maintain our quality over the course of the year.

### Supplemental Security Income (SSI)/ Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)

Total Receipt of Cases	75,330
Total Disposition of Cases	76,620
Initial Claims Filed	44,306
Initial Claims Disposed	42,724
% Allowed	42.9%
Continuing Disability Review Receipts	16,478
Continuing Disability Review Dispositions	19,684
Accuracy of Decisions	96.9%
Consultative Examinations Purchased	17,117
Consultative Examination Rate	22.3%
Medical Evidence of Record Purchased	67,694
Medical Evidence of Record Rate	88.4%

### SSI/SSDI Summary

Massachusetts Population Estimate 2019	6,900,000
MA SSI Recipients, 2018	183,889
MA SSDI Recipients, 2018	226,065
Annual SSI Benefits Paid	\$3.33B
Annual SSDI Benefits Paid	\$1.19B

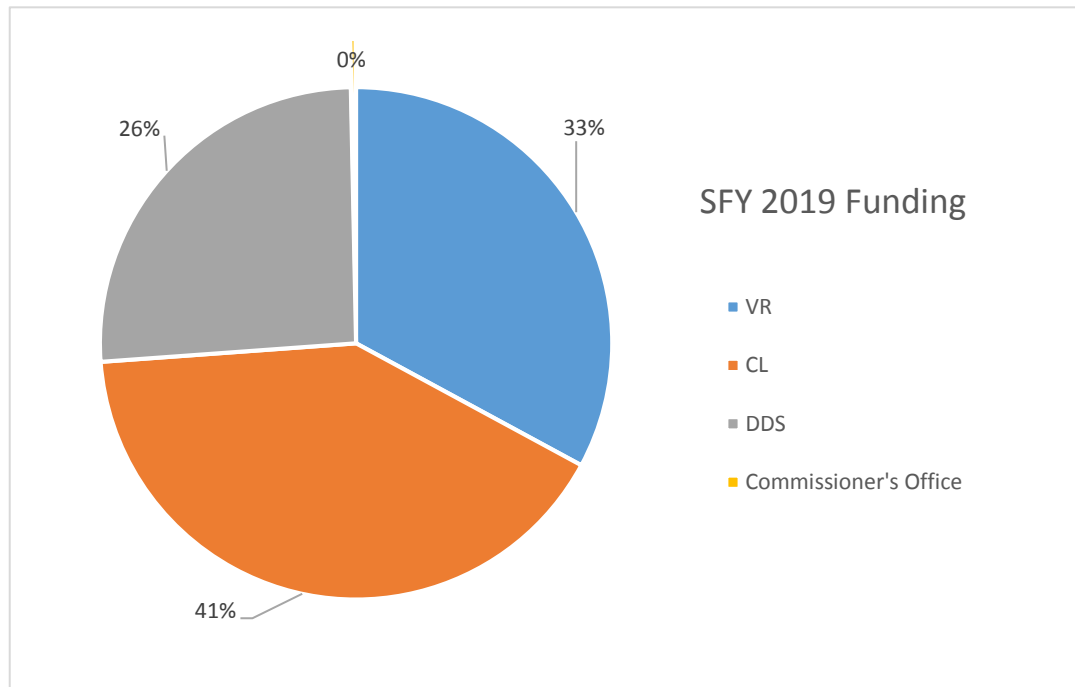
## Funding Streams

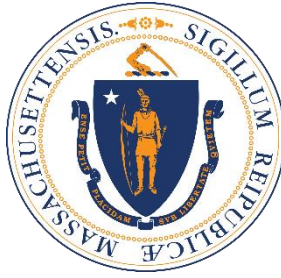
The MRC Office for Financial Management and Budget supports the fiscal operations and planning for the agency and oversees internal controls. Our main objective is to furnish effective budgeting, purchase of services, internal controls, and financial management to the entire agency to assist in supporting its mission and vision.

### Overall Funding:

SFY 2019		Funding Source					% of Program Budget
		State	Federal	Trust	Capital	Total	
Net Agency Funding	Vocational Rehabilitation <sup>+</sup>	\$22,939,859	\$34,347,991	\$2,867,599	-	\$60,155,449	33%
	Community Living	\$56,360,229	\$2,930,462	\$9,095,541	\$6,500,000	\$74,886,233	41%
	Disability Determination	-	47,219,841	-	-	\$47,219,841	26%
	Commissioner's Office	\$600,898	-	-	-	\$600,898	0%
<b>Agency Funding Total</b>		\$79,900,986	\$84,498,294	\$11,963,141	\$6,500,000	<b>\$182,862,421</b>	
<b>Percentage of Overall Budget</b>		44%	46%	7%	4%		

<sup>+</sup> This budget item include a one time, state funded, supplement of \$10.1 Million.





**Charles D. Baker**  
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**Karyn E. Polito**  
*Lieutenant Governor*

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**Toni A. Wolf**  
*Commissioner, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission*



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