Severely Visually Impaired Veterans
There are approximately 400 legally BLIND veterans in the western two-thirds of Oklahoma that I know of.
There are approximately 400 legally **BLIND** veterans in the western two-thirds of Oklahoma.

There are approximately 5-7 times as many **LOW VISION** veterans, who have trouble reading even with glasses, have difficulty driving safely, who struggle with adjusting in different lighting conditions, and cannot see well further than across the room.
• The total number of U.S. veterans as of the end of 2007 was 23,816,000, of which 1,780,000 (or 7%) were women. By 2020 women veterans will be close to 13% of the veteran population.

• In sharp contrast, the estimated and projected population of male veterans is projected to decline by 32% in the same period (from 23,638,000 in 2007 to 16.2 million in 2020).

Sources: Office of Policy & Planning National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics
Office of the Actuary, Department of Veterans Affairs
While the overall number of veterans has been declining, the number of blind veterans will be increasing by 10% per year at least until the year 2012.
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The number of blind women veterans is expected to more than double in the next 10 years.
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The number of blind women veterans is expected to more than double in the next 10 years.

“To care for him who shall have borne the battle….“ (Abraham Lincoln)
Population of U.S. Veterans

(in thousands)

2010: 23,000
2011: 22,500
2012: 22,000
2013: 21,500
2014: 21,000
2015: 20,500
Population of Veterans Over 65

![Bar chart showing the population of veterans over 65 from 2010 to 2015.](chart.png)
Identification and Outreach

Projected Numbers of Legally Blind Veterans

Year

Total Legally Blind Veterans

Enrolled Legally Blind Veterans
Brief History of VA Blind Rehabilitation
The Visual Impairment Services Team

VIST
POLICY: It is the policy of Oklahoma City Medical Center to have the VIST (John Laakman) coordinate individualized health-related services specific to blindness.

The VIST is the basic unit within the health services delivery system representing the interface between the hospital, Department of Veterans Benefits Administration, and blinded veterans in the community.

As such, it has the major role in promoting and maintaining administrative and clinical services for eligible legally blind veterans within CTVHCS' area of jurisdiction.

VI. RESPONSIBILITY:
A. Medical Center Director or designee is responsible for approving a policy which ensures appropriate care for visually impaired veterans.
The VIST, consisting of these members: Chairperson will be elected by the regular VIST members and will serve one year.

VIST Coordinator (124)
Chief, Medical Service or designee (012)
Chief, Social Work Service or designee (122)
Associate Director of Patient/Nursing Services or designee (118)
Chief, Audiology Section or designee (126)
Chief, Health Services Administration or designee (136)
Chief, Ophthalmology Section or designee (112)
Chief, Blind Rehabilitation Service or designee (124)
Chief, Chaplain Service or designee (125)
Chief, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Svc. or designee (117)
Chief, Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service or designee (121)
Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist Specialist (124)
VBA Veterans Benefits Counselor
Definition of Legal Blindness

Blind by loss of visual acuity: Legal blindness exists when best corrected central visual acuity in the better-seeing eye is less than or equal to 20/200, or
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Blind by loss of visual acuity: Legal blindness exists when best corrected central visual acuity in the better-seeing eye is less than or equal to 20/200, or

Blind by loss of **visual fields**: visual field dimension in the better-seeing eye is less than or equal to 20 degrees at the widest diameter, even if central visual acuity is better than 20/200.
There is no universal consensus on the definitions for low vision and blindness. In its broadest sense, low vision can be defined as any visual impairment that results in disability and that interferes with the ability to perform everyday activities and cannot be corrected medically, surgically, or with conventional eyeglasses.
• Visual acuity 20/60 is the minimum acuity required to read standard newspaper print

• In the U.S., low vision is often considered to be a visual acuity of less than 20/40 in the better seeing eye. This is the criterion used by many states for the provision of an unrestricted driver’s license. Many experts contend that this threshold, is an inappropriate threshold with which to define low vision.
WHO Definition of Low Vision

This is the World Health Organization's definition of low vision which is widely used internationally:

“A person with low vision is one who has impairment of visual functioning even after treatment and/or standard refractive correction, and has a visual acuity of less than 6/18 to light perception, or a visual field less than 10 degrees from the point of fixation, but who uses, or is potentially able to use, vision for the planning and/or execution of a task.”

Most people develop low vision because of eye diseases such as cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy or age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

Low vision primarily affects people over age 65. High risk populations include Hispanics and African Americans, who are likely to develop low vision at an earlier age.

While lost vision usually cannot be restored, many people can learn to make the most of the vision that remains.
### Table 2. Primary Causes of Low Vision in the Elderly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Clinical Presentation</th>
<th>Associated Disabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMD</td>
<td>Reduced visual acuity</td>
<td>Difficulty reading, inability to recognize faces, distortion or disappearance of central vision, reduced color vision, reduced contrast perception, mobility difficulties related to loss of depth and contrast cues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetic retinopathy</td>
<td>Reduced visual acuity, Scattered central scotoma, Peripheral and mid-peripheral scotoma, Macula edema</td>
<td>Difficulty with tasks requiring fine-detail vision such as reading, distorted central vision, fluctuating vision, loss of color perception, mobility problems due to loss of depth and contrast cues. In severe cases, total blindness can occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glaucoma</td>
<td>Degeneration of the optic disc, Loss of peripheral vision (constricted visual field)</td>
<td>Mobility and reading problems due to restricted visual fields, people suddenly appearing in the visual field. In severe cases, total blindness can occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cataract(^a)</td>
<td>Reduced visual acuity, Light scatter, Sensitivity to glare, Image distortion</td>
<td>Remedied by lens extraction in 90% of cases. If not, difficulty with detail vision, difficulty with bright and changing light levels, reduced color vision, decreased contrast perception, mobility difficulties related to loss of depth and contrast cues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Vision loss experienced by most individuals with cataract can be reversed. Consequently, many elderly individuals with cataract will not be considered as candidates for vision rehabilitation.
What It's Like

This is how a street scene looks with normal vision. This is how the same scene looks with cataracts.

Photos of simulated eye conditions provided by Lighthouse International website: www.lighthouse.org
What It's Like

This is how a street scene looks with normal vision.

The same scene with diabetic retinopathy.
What It's Like

This is how a street scene looks with normal vision.

Example of Glaucoma.
What It's Like

This is how a street scene looks with normal vision.

Example of Retinitis Pigmentosa
What It's Like

This is how a street scene looks with normal vision.

Example of a Macular Degeneration
Causes of Blindness

- Diabetic Retinopathy: 11%
- Glaucoma: 24%
- Retinitis Pigmentosa: 11%
- Macular Degeneration: 46%
- Trauma: 8%
Physically get dressed
Keep your clothes clean
Identify medicine
Tell time
Identify money
Match clothes
Groom yourself
Identify food on plate
Eat and drink neatly
Fix a snack
Prepare meals
Use appliance dials
Clean the house
Handle finances
Make out a check
Take a message
Find something on a crowded shelf
Get around familiar indoors
Get around familiar outdoors
Get around in unfamiliar places
Get out at night
Go down steps in dim light
Adjust to bright light
Cross streets at traffic light
Use public transportation
Get around in a crowd
Avoid bumping into things
Recognize persons up close
Recognize persons across room
Read street signs
Read headlines
Read menus
Read newspaper or magazine
Read mail
Read small print on labels
Read print on TV
Keep your place while reading
Watch TV
Play table and card games
See photos
Work on your favorite hobby
Go to movies
Go to spectator events
Play sports
Do yard work
Sign your name
Read signs
Blind Rehabilitation Centers

- Provide comprehensive, individualized, inpatient blind rehabilitation.
- Full clinical support services.
- Continuity of care at admission through discharge.
Eligibility

• Catastrophically disabled exemption
• Special disability ratings for blindness
• Agent Orange and diabetes for Vietnam vets
• Prosthetics after VIST enrollment
The Blind Rehabilitation Center

SKILL AREAS
– Visual Skills
– Living Skills
– Manual Skills Orientation & Mobility
– Computer Access Training
– Medical Education

BRC FAMILY TRAINING PROGRAM
VA Offers Help To Blind Veterans

Eligible blind veterans may receive blind rehabilitation training through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The VA Blind Rehabilitation Center in Waco, Texas offers a comprehensive adjustment training program to compensate for veterans’ vision loss. Training is provided in these general areas:

- **Visual Skills** — vision rehabilitation with low vision aids to maximize remaining vision
- **Living Skills** — training in personal management & daily living, Braille, and talking devices
- **Manual Skills** — self-confidence in shop areas with tools & leisure time activities
- **Orientation & Mobility** — training to travel independently in all environments
- **Computer Access Training** — training & issuance of computer equipment adapted for the blind
- **Medical Education** — training with techniques and special devices adapted for blind patients

Contact Visual Impairment Team Coordinator:
254 297-3123 or 1800 423-2111, extension 53123
VA Blind Rehab Centers

- Central BRC (Hines) – Chicago, IL
- Eastern BRC – West Haven, CT
- Southeastern BRC – Birmingham, AL
- Western BRC – Palo Alto, CA
- Waco BRC – Waco, TX
- American Lake BRC – Tacoma, WA
- Puerto Rico BRC – San Juan, PR
- Southwestern BRC – Tucson, AZ
- Augusta BRC – Augusta, GA
- West Palm Beach BRC – West Palm Beach, FL
- Biloxi BRC – Biloxi
• Lighting – inside & outside
• Painting for contrast
• Safety & security
• Additions
• Sidewalks & covered driveways
• Doors & cabinets
• Bathrooms & doorways
Blindness & The Family

- Vision inherited: ("family history")

- Family involvement: required by JCAHO, CARF; BRC Family Program

- Support & Adjustment: care giving; helping to motivate veterans for blind rehabilitation
A Few Tips For Family Members

Small adjustments to make daily life easier

• Identify yourself
• Allow the person to speak for himself
• Educate others about blindness
• Don’t be condescending or overprotective
• Give simple verbal directions
• Use felt pen to write notes or directions
• Use tactile markings for reference
• Pay attention to lighting and furniture arrangement
• Communicate with friends and family
• Ask the veteran how you can help
• Encourage the person to consider rehabilitation
Resources & Websites

American Foundation for the Blind:  http://www.afb.org/

National Federation of the Blind:  http://www.nfb.org/

Blinded Veterans Association:  http://www.bva.org/

Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitative Services, Division of Visual Services:  http://okrehab.org/org/org.dvs.htm

Lighthouse International:  http://www.lighthouse.org