

<b>Agency #'s</b>	<b>330-00</b>	<b>331-00</b>
	<b>332-00</b>	<b>333-00</b>
	<b>334-00</b>	<b>337-00</b>
	<b>211-00</b>	<b>235-00</b>



**5 Year Strategic Plan  
Fiscal Year 2021-2025**

## **1. Comprehensive Mission Statement:**

It is the mission of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS), to provide appropriate and comprehensive services to Mississippians with disabilities in a timely and effective manner. Programs and services assist individuals with disabilities to gain employment, retain employment and to live more independently.

## **2. Philosophy**

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services is committed to being recognized as the premier agency for Mississippians with disabilities by creating a culture of care with compassionate, valued, and knowledgeable staff. We will promote an environment where customers and staff work together to achieve our common goal of empowering and improving the lives of Mississippians with disabilities.

## **3. Relevant Statewide Goals and Benchmarks**

In reviewing the Statewide Strategic Plan for Performance and Budgetary Success document entitled “Building a Better Mississippi,” we noted the nine key policy areas. These areas included (1) Economic Development, (2) Education: Public Schools, (3) Education: Higher Education, (4) Public Safety and Order; (5) Health; (6) Human Services; (7) Natural Resources; (8) Infrastructure; and (9) Government and Citizens. In reviewing these nine key policy statements, below are respective areas and associated Goals and Benchmarks the MS Department of Rehabilitation Services strives to meet.

### **(1) Economic Development**

**Statewide Goal #1.** To develop a robust state economy that provides the opportunity for productive employment for all Mississippians.

1. **Relevant Benchmark 1 (Business Climate):** State business tax climate (comparison of more than 100 variables across five major areas of taxation: business taxes, individual income taxes, sales taxes, unemployment insurance rates and property taxes).
2. **Relevant Benchmark 2 (Job Growth):** Net job growth

3. Relevant Benchmark 3 (Employment and Income):

- i. Percentage of the civilian non-institutional population 16 years and over employed.
- ii. Percentage of Mississippians receiving workforce training services who are employed one year to five years after receiving training and their average salary.
- iii. Unemployment rate (unemployed persons actively looking for a job as a percentage of the size of the labor force: the sum of employed and unemployed persons).
- iv. Wage and salary disbursements (total earnings)
- v. Average annual pay
- vi. Median household income
- vii. Percentage of workers whose family income falls above 150% of the federal poverty guidelines.

(2) **Education: Higher Education**

**Statewide Goal #2:** To make available an accessible, quality public higher education at an affordable cost that prepares Mississippians to become productive, financially self-sufficient members of society while meeting the human resource needs of Mississippi and its employees, including the creation of new jobs through the commercialization of university-based research.

A. Relevant Benchmark (Workforce Development):

- a. Percentage of AAS (technical) graduates employed in jobs in their field of study within a year of graduation (job placement rate).
- b. Percentage of certificate graduates employed in jobs in their field of study within a year of graduation (job placement rate).
- c. Percentage of students trained through workforce educations and training programs customized to meet the needs of local industries who successfully complete the program.

(3) **Health**

**Statewide Goal #3:** To protect Mississippians from risks to public health and to provide them with the health related information and access to quality healthcare necessary to increase the length and quality of their lives.

A. Relevant Benchmark (Access to Care):

- a. Number of individuals on waiting lists for home and community-based services.

**(4) Human Services**

**Statewide Goal #4:** To ensure that Mississippians are able to develop to their full potential by having their basic needs met, including the need for adequate food and shelter and a healthy, stable, and nurturing family environment or a competent and caring system of social support.

A. **Relevant Benchmark (Vocational Services):**

- a. Percentage of the population of persons with a disability who are employed.
- b. Percentage of individuals completing vocational rehabilitation services who obtain employment.
- c. Percentage of individuals completing vocational rehabilitation services who obtain employment with hourly rate of earnings equal to the federal or state minimum wage rate, whichever is higher.
- d. Percentage of individuals who obtain employment following completion of vocational rehabilitation services who remain employed (one-year and five-year follow-up).

**4. Overview of the Agency 5-Year Strategic Plan**

The MS Department of Rehabilitation Services maintains four program offices. These offices are (1) The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, (2) The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, (3) The Office of Disability Determination Services, and (4) The Office of Special Disability Programs. Within these four major programs we identify various goals and benchmarks that support the State of Mississippi's statewide goals and benchmarks. A summary of each program is noted below:

- 1. **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation**
- 2. **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind**

It is the primary goal of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind to provide appropriate and comprehensive services to Mississippians with disabilities in a timely and effective manner and assure that services within the scope of Vocational Rehabilitation Services are available to assist eligible individuals with an individualized plan for employment (IPE) in achieving their career goals. Through providing services to Mississippians with disabilities and

assisting them in obtaining or retaining successful employment, the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services will provide workforce development and vocational services, improve the business climate, increase job growth and improve employment and income for all of Mississippi.

Through outreach, education, and marketing efforts targeted to individuals with disabilities, VR will continue to broaden the population of individuals with disabilities being served. VR will continue to target individuals with disabilities who are already working to return or progress in employment, previous VR consumers who may have lost employment to become reemployed, college students nearing completion of their academic programs, high school transition age youth with disabilities, individuals with blindness and visual impairments, individuals with deafness and hearing impairments, and youth and adults with the most significant disabilities.

### 3. Office of Disability Determination Services

It is the primary goal of the Office of Disability Determination Services is to provide accurate, prompt, and cost-effective disability decisions for individuals with physical and mental disabilities who apply for benefits through the Social Security Administration (SSA).

MDRS will ensure continued success of this program through objectives which include: continuing to clear the number of dispositions as set by SSA, attaining a processing time threshold that meets or exceeds that set by SSA, meeting or exceeding accuracy rates as measured by SSA, and meeting or exceeding the Production per Work Year goals as set by SSA. In recent years, the number of claims filed has been decreasing, which has affected our budgeted workload. SSA has generally asked that we clear as many claims as we receive.

MDRS anticipates external changes with this program through factors such as: SSA's push for states to become current with Continuing Disability Reviews (CDRs); the introduction of a new system our DDS unit will use to process disability determinations; and working with DFA to ensure our vendors are paid timely through MAGIC. The new system (DCPS) was implemented to part of the staff (2 examiners) in February 2019. Since that time, we have gradually increased the number of examiners processing claims under the dual system (utilizing new system to process new claims while continuing to utilize the old system for claims pending at the time of conversion). Currently, we have

12 examiners utilizing the system. In addition to the 12 examiners, we have 52 other staff members utilizing the new system. Other staff include doctors, clerical staff, supervisors, administrative staff, and other support functions. One of our major concerns with implementation was being able to work with DFA through MAGIC to assure our vendors were paid. Thus far, the process has gone well. We will continue to work with DFA to ensure payments to our vendors are processed and remitted to vendors in a timely manner.

4. Office of Special Disability Programs

It is the primary goal of the Office of Special Disability Programs to provide timely and quality services to individuals with severe disabilities that will enable and empower them to live as independently as possible within their home and community. The Office of Special Disability Programs embraces the concepts of consumer input, consumer choice, expansion of services, outreach to minorities and accountability in its mission. Through services provided, the MS Department of Rehabilitation Services will ensure Mississippians with severe disabilities, are provided access to care and are able to develop their full potential by having their basic needs met.

**Programs:**

**Home and Community-Based Waivers** provide long-term services and supports to individuals in their homes and communities with nursing home level of care as an alternative to nursing home care in order for them to remain independent in their homes and communities.

**The Independent Living Grant** provides funding for solutions that help individuals with disabilities regain more independence in their environments.

**The Traumatic Brain Injury/Spinal Cord Injury Trust Fund** provides direct services to individuals who have sustained traumatic brain injuries and spinal cord injuries. Innovative programs are also provided to focus on the awareness, education, and prevention of these conditions.

**The State Attendant Care Program** provides personal care services to individuals who have severe disabilities and are not eligible to receive these services through other sources. Participants cannot be eligible to receive duplicate services under any other program.

MDRS will ensure continued success of this program through objectives, which include

the following: providing supports and services through our waiver programs; creating cost savings to the Division of Medicaid through home and community based services as opposed to institutional care; ensure training and certification standards that promote high-quality services; and deter abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Additionally, MDRS will continue to work with the Division of Medicaid to maintain a Long Term Services and Supports system for all waivers. MDRS will continue to train staff, work with our federal and state partners, and provide communications to our clients and personal care attendants to ensure compliance with new federal requirements and the use of the new state tracking system.

## **5. Agency's External / Internal Assessment**

1. Reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act. In fiscal year 2014, the Rehabilitation Act was reauthorized and passed by Congress and signed by the President in July 2014. The Act is known as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), and the WIOA Final Regulation was made available on June 30, 2016. Through this regulation, many changes will occur which will affect our programs in the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind. A few of the known changes include: a greater emphasis on serving youth through transition, a change in the standards regarding the qualifications of our counselor staff and changes in the match rates associated with two of the grants we receive from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Because of these changes, successful rehabilitations will take much longer, and counselors will be able to serve and rehabilitate fewer clients. As a result, new performance accountability measures have been imposed and became effective July 1, 2017. Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind are now subject to common indicators of performance as included in WIOA.
2. Affordable Care Act. Effective January 1, 2015, employers employing over 100 FTE's are required to provide health insurance through the Affordable Care Act. Under this Act, any employee working on average 30 or more hours per week during the agency's respective look-back period must be offered health insurance. The health insurance premiums are funded by the employer. This requirement under the Affordable Care Act affects the Office of Special Disability Programs and the Spinal Cord and Traumatic Brain Injury Program in the Home and Community-Based Waiver programs they

administer through an agreement with the Division of Medicaid. MDRS is required to offer insurance to those eligible Personal Care Attendants. Although the employee mandate is no longer in effect, the employer mandate remains.

3. Department of Labor. Effective January 1, 2015, DOL's Final Rule 78 Federal Register 60,454 removed the overtime exemption for in-home workers. This continues to affect the Office of Special Disability Programs and the Spinal Cord and Traumatic Brain Injury Program in the Home and Community-Based Waiver programs they administer through an agreement with the Division of Medicaid.
4. Continuing Disability Reviews. Mississippi continues to be current with processing Continuing Disability Review (CDR) claims. We have volunteered to process more CDRs than originally asked to assure the Region meets its budgeted workload.
5. Federal Funding Awarded to MDRS. Nearly 90% of the funding received by the MS Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) is derived from federal sources. As a result, MDRS must pay particular attention to any news regarding the federal budget to ensure we can sustain current operations in the event of a federal shutdown.
6. Development of Workforce and Succession Planning. Workforce development and succession planning is extremely important to MDRS to ensure that the agency continues providing the most effective and efficient services to our clients. MDRS maintains a succession program known as LEADRS that provides leadership training to employees. Through this training process, program participants have direct access to all executive staff, as well as receive management training from certified trainers.
7. Long Term Services and Supports. The Division of Medicaid has developed, in conjunction with other State Agency partners, an automated tracking system for Long Term Care Services and Supports in Mississippi. Electronic tools have also been developed for the system. Although the Balancing Incentive Program Grant (BIP, as provided under the Affordable Care Act) expired September 30, 2015, it mandated sustainability of any systems created under the Grant.  
  
Maintaining the expansion of the Independent Living and Traumatic Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Waivers will be the responsibility of MDRS.

MDRS maintains a strong partnership with the Federal granting agencies as well as participates in the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) to ensure MDRS is



made aware of any federal changes or amendments to federal requirements in a timely manner. MDRS also partners with other state agencies within Mississippi to ensure services provided and funding expended best benefits our clients and the taxpayers of Mississippi. Also, through regular staff meetings of the Executive Support Team, management is made aware of each program administered by MDRS and any challenges the programs are facing as well as the outcomes of each program. Lastly, MDRS annually has audits by independent accounting firms in adherence to requirements set forth by the Yellow Book requirements and the Single Audit Act.

## **6. Agency Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Measures by Program for FY 2021 through FY 2025**

**A. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)** provides services designed to improve economic opportunities for individuals with physical and mental disabilities through employment. In addition to general vocational rehabilitation services, programs include Supported Employment, Transition Services, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, and a network of 15 community rehabilitation centers ([AbilityWorks](#)) located throughout the state. These centers provide vocational assessment, job training and work experience for individuals with disabilities.

It is the primary goal of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to provide appropriate and comprehensive services to eligible individuals with disabilities that will assist them in obtaining and retaining competitive integrated employment that is consistent with the individual's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, and capabilities.

**B. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (VRB)** specializes in working with individuals with blindness and low vision to optimize their opportunities for inclusion into the workforce, community, and home. Counselors provide and coordinate services leading to employment which include vocational training, job placement, on-the-job training, orientation and mobility training, independent living skills training, career counseling and guidance, low vision aids and appliances, and job modification including adaptive technology. In addition to the specialized counselor's services, other program supports

include the Addie McBryde Center for the Blind, the Business Enterprise Program, the Independent Living Services for the Blind, and the Mississippi Partners for Informed Choice. These programs provide an array of services intended to provide the skills to enable clients to remain independent in their homes, as well as to provide the confidence to seek their highest level of employment, regardless of the nature of the employment.

It is the primary goal of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind to assist an Individual in achieving or maintaining an employment outcome that is consistent with his/her unique strengths, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice.

#### Overall Goal

It is the primary goal of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind to provide appropriate and comprehensive services to Mississippians with disabilities in a timely and effective manner, in order to assist them in obtaining or retaining successful employment.

Due to changes in the Rehabilitation Act and with the enactment of WIOA, new performance measures became effective July 1, 2017. Therefore, Objectives 1 and 2 in this section are no longer required by the federal grantor to be measured. However, as an agency, we feel that these objectives are still noteworthy and provide valuable information to the reader. For this Strategic Plan, these two objectives (Objective 1 and Objective 2) are being included for informational purposes only. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind are primarily responsible for assuring that services within the scope of Vocational Rehabilitation Services are available to assist eligible individuals with an individualized plan for employment in achieving their goals.

**Objective 1: At a minimum meet or increase the number of individuals who successfully become employed after receiving VR Services.**

<b>FFY</b>	<b>Number Rehabilitated</b>
<b>2021</b>	3,050
<b>2022</b>	3,060
<b>2023</b>	3,070
<b>2024</b>	3,080
<b>2025</b>	3,090

Strategy A.1.1 The number of individuals with disabilities with significant/most significant disabilities that exited the VR program that achieved an employment outcome during the current performance period compared to the number that achieved an employment outcome in the previous performance period.

*Output:* Number of clients rehabilitated

**Objective 2: Meet or increase the number of individuals served through VR.**

<b>FFY</b>	<b>Number Served</b>
<b>2021</b>	13,000
<b>2022</b>	13,050
<b>2023</b>	13,100
<b>2024</b>	13,150
<b>2025</b>	13,200

Strategy A.1.1 The number of individuals with disabilities with significant/most significant disabilities served through the VR program shall meet or exceed the number served in the previous performance period.

*Output:* Number of clients served

**Objective 3: Implement a statewide model for more effectively serving high school youth and students with disabilities including individuals with visual and/or hearing impairments.**

Strategy A.1.1 The number of youth applying for services will increase 5% from the previous year.

*Output:* Number of youth participants

<b>FFY</b>	<b>Number of Youth Participants</b>
<b>2021</b>	2,500
<b>2022</b>	2,550
<b>2023</b>	2,560
<b>2024</b>	2,565
<b>2025</b>	2,570

Strategy A.1.2 The number of youth that enter training or exit with an employment outcome will increase 5% from the previous year.

*Output:* Number of youth who exit high school in training or with an employment outcome.

<b>FFY</b>	<b>Number of Youth with an Employment Outcome</b>
<b>2021</b>	512
<b>2022</b>	538
<b>2023</b>	565
<b>2024</b>	593
<b>2025</b>	623

- C. The Office of Special Disability Programs (OSDP)** offers programs and services that specialize in assisting individuals with severe physical disabilities and neurological impairments to remain active in their homes and communities. Services are provided based on need as determined by functional assessment, and are provided through an individualized plan of services and supports.
- D. Spinal Cord and Traumatic Brain Injury Program** offers programs to enable individuals who have sustained a severe traumatic brain or spinal cord injury to resume the activities of daily living and reintegrate into the community with as much dignity and independence as possible.

**Programs:**

**Home and Community-Based Waivers** provide long-term services and supports to individuals in their homes and communities as an alternative to nursing home care.

**The Independent Living Grant** provides funding for solutions that help individuals with disabilities regain more independence in their environments.

**The Traumatic Brain Injury/Spinal Cord Injury Trust Fund** provides direct services to individuals who have sustained traumatic brain injuries and spinal cord injuries. Innovative programs are also provided to focus on the awareness and prevention of these conditions.

**The State Attendant Care Program** provides personal care services to individuals who have severe disabilities and are not eligible to receive these services through other sources. Participants cannot be eligible to receive duplicate services under any other program.

Overall Goal

It is the goal of the Office of Special Disability Programs to provide timely and quality services to individuals with severe disabilities that will enable and empower them to live as independently as possible within their home and community or to be maintained in employment. The Office of Special Disability Programs embraces the concepts of consumer input, consumer choice, expansion of services, outreach to minorities and accountability in its mission.

**Objective 1. Home and Community-Based Services — Waivers.** Provide supports and services through Medicaid waivers in homes and community settings that will enable individuals with disabilities and who qualify for nursing facility care but can be served at home or in the community to maintain their independence and prevent institutionalization.

*Outcome:* Provide Home and Community-Based Waiver services to Mississippians with severe disabilities. Note: numbers served are contingent upon match funding received.

**Note: Total numbers served by fiscal year:**

<b>FY</b>	<b>Number Served</b>
<b>2021</b>	4,200
<b>2022</b>	4,300
<b>2023</b>	4,600
<b>2024</b>	4,900
<b>2025</b>	5,200

*Outcome:* Reduce the waiting time for Mississippians with severe disabilities who are eligible for home and community-based waiver services.

Strategy A.1.1: Request adequate state funding from MS Legislature to provide state match on Home and Community-Based Waiver services to ensure eligible clients can be served.

*Output:* Number of individuals receiving waiver services.

*Output:* Reduction of waiting time for Waiver services.

Strategy A.1.2: Provide supervisory review of case files and referral lists to ensure clients are served correctly and efficiently.

*Output:* Improve quality assurance.

*Output:* Reduction of waiting times for waiver services.

**Objective 2. Cost Savings to the State of Mississippi.** Provide individualized services not to exceed institutional cost. These services are provided to individuals who can be served in their own home and community through the Home and Community Based Waiver programs.

*Outcome:* Provide cost effective services to clients eligible for Home and Community Based Waiver (HCBW) services.

Strategy A.1.1: Monitor costs to ensure costs provided through HCBW services are below institutional costs.

*Output:* Ensure clients receive high-quality services in a cost efficient manner.

**Objective 3. Certification.** MDRS will ensure continued success of this program through objectives; which include the following: providing supports and services through our waiver programs, creating cost savings to the Division of Medicaid through home and community based services as opposed to institutional care; ensure training and certification standards that promote high-quality services; and deter abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

*Outcome:* Quality services to clients by enrolling personal care attendants through annual client specific training.

Strategy A.1.1: Continued review of service provision.

*Output:* Case reviews.

*Output:* Quality services.

*Output:* Abuse, neglect, and exploitation deterrent.

**Objective 4. Information Technology.** Enhance automated systems that assist the end users in becoming more efficient and effective in their service delivery.

*Outcome:* Efficient and effective services to clients to ensure clients are not at risk of losing certification.

Strategy A.1.1: Work jointly with the Division of Medicaid in the development and/or enhancement of automated systems.

*Output:* Attend meetings with Medicaid regarding system changes.

*Output:* Monitor reports generated by automated systems to ensure systems provide efficient and effective data.

**E. The Office of Disability Determination Services (DDS)**, which is funded entirely through the Social Security Administration, establishes eligibility for Mississippians with severe disabilities who apply for Social Security Disability Insurance and/or Supplemental Security Income.

Overall Goal

The primary goal of the Office of Disability Determination Services is to provide accurate, prompt, and cost-effective disability decisions for physically and mentally disabled individuals who apply for benefits under the Social Security Administration (SSA).

**Objective 1. Dispositions.** Clear the projected number of case dispositions as set by the Social Security Administration.

*Outcome:* Provide accurate dispositions of cases.

*Outcome:* Ensure those applying for disability receive a determination in a timely manner.

Strategy A.1.1: Request SSA funding for adequate staff necessary to ensure MDRS clears the proper number of case dispositions as set forth by SSA.

*Output:* Number of Case dispositions.

*Output:* Number of staff assigned to process claimant cases.

Strategy A.1.2: Provide technical advice and training to staff to ensure cases are cleared as efficiently as possible.

*Output:* Amount of training offered.

*Output:* Knowledge and experience of staff performing case dispositions.



**Note: Total anticipated case dispositions by year:**

<b>FY</b>	<b>Dispositions</b>
<b>2021</b>	90,000
<b>2022</b>	92,000
<b>2023</b>	93,000
<b>2024</b>	94,000
<b>2025</b>	94,000

**Objective 2. Processing Time.** Attain a processing time threshold for Initial Disability Claims as established by the Social Security Administration.

*Outcome:* Provide dispositions of cases in a timely and efficient manner.

*Outcome:* Ensure those applying for disability receive a determination in a timely manner.

Strategy A.1.1: Provide proper supervision of examiner staff to ensure cases are processed timely.

*Output:* Average processing time per case.

*Output:* Number of staff assigned to process claimant cases.

*Efficiency:* Provide processing times of cases that meet or exceed that required by SSA.

Strategy A.1.2: Provide technical advice and training to staff to ensure cases are cleared as efficiently as possible.

*Output:* Amount of training offered.

*Output:* Knowledge and experience of staff performing case dispositions.

**Note: Total processing time by year:**

<b>FY</b>	<b>Processing Time</b>
<b>2021</b>	113 days
<b>2022</b>	113 days
<b>2023</b>	113 days
<b>2024</b>	114 days
<b>2025</b>	114 days

**Objective 3. Accuracy Rate.** Meet or exceed the quality of Initial Title II and Title XVI disability decisions standards as measured by the Social Security Administration on its yearly Net Accuracy Report.

*Outcome:* Provide disability determinations in an accurate manner.

Strategy A.1.1: Provide proper supervision of examiner staff to ensure cases are processed timely.

*Output:* Accuracy of determinations made.

Strategy A.1.2: Provide technical advice and training to staff to ensure cases are cleared as efficiently as possible.

*Output:* Amount of training offered.

*Output:* Knowledge and experience of staff performing case dispositions.

*Efficiency:* Provide determinations that meet or exceed that accuracy rate as set forth by SSA

**Note: Required accuracy rate for each year as set forth by SSA**

<b>FY</b>	<b>Accuracy Rate</b>
<b>2021</b>	97%
<b>2022</b>	97%
<b>2023</b>	97%
<b>2024</b>	97%
<b>2025</b>	97%

**Objective 4. Production per Work Year.** Meet or exceed the National Production per Work Year (PPWY) as set by the Social Security Administration.

*Outcome:* Comply with SSA's PPWY for each fiscal year.

Strategy A.1.1: Provide proper reporting and supervision by management to ensure  
PPWY exceeds the National PPWY.

*Output:* Meet or exceed the National Production per Work Year (PPWY) as set  
by SSA.

**Note: Total Production per Work Year for each fiscal year.**

<b>FY</b>	<b>Production per Work Year</b>
<b>2021</b>	300
<b>2022</b>	300
<b>2023</b>	300
<b>2024</b>	300
<b>2025</b>	300